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THE BISHOP'S SCAPEGOAT

By the Same Author

**THE WILDERNESS
THE LOVE CHILD**

THE BISHOP'S SCAPEGOAT

BY

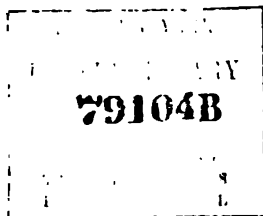
THOMAS BAILEY CLEGG

Author of "The Wilderness," "The Love Child," etc.

L. C.

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The Bishop's Scapegoat

CHAPTER I

THE Vicar was an early riser, by preference and by conviction. Being not yet far removed from the prime of manhood, the Rev. Frank Perivale still cherished some convictions. He believed in having them and holding to them strongly. Convinced that early rising was a desirable condition, he put away from him with the asceticism of strong convictions the cosiness of the warm bed where his help-mate, in conviction less robust, slept peacefully under ample bedclothes.

However, this spring morning in the late seventies, it needed no special effort on his part to overcome any temptation to self-indulgence. Getting up was not now, as in the winter days, a dismal performance by candle-light, but a joyous rising to greet the sunlight. It filled the bedchamber, as he drew back the curtains from the latticed window of the old Vicarage, and looked out on its garden filled with roses. In the hedges beyond it the black-

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thorn blossoms had fallen. The perfume of fragrant masses of snow-white may was a memory of yesterday. Already the dog-rose tangled its branches in the green leafage.

He thought, as he returned from his bath, how good a thing it was to be in England, now that summer was here; and then, with a glance at his sleeping wife, sighed at the inborn weakness of woman for warmth and slumber, unmindful of the rare delight of such a morning as this.

It was so early that the maids had not yet risen. Letting himself out of the house, he whistled to his dog, and together they started on a morning ramble.

Near the Vicarage, within a stone's throw of it, stood the parish church. The land on which both it and the dwelling-house stood had been originally a grant by Edward the Confessor. The churchyard was entered from the Vicarage grounds by a rustic stile, the pathway to the church being overshadowed by some ancient yew trees and a fine old cedar. The church itself, rebuilt somewhere about the fourteenth century, was dedicated to St. Mary. It consisted of nave and chancel and had been constructed of flint and rubble coated with cement. Now ivy covered its walls and clambered in thick masses round the low belfry surmounted by a short octagonal spire. The old gravestones were covered with moss and lichen, some indicating the graves of the richer folk, while here and there

straight boards planted on short wooden posts marked the resting-places of the poorer dead. Over the lych-gate at the further entrance, two climbing roses trailed, their heavy damask-coloured blossoms scenting the air, and almost concealing the quaint inscription, "High and low, rich and poor together."

The Vicar let himself into the church by the clumsy key he had brought from the house. One window of modern glass was practically the only indignity in the way of modernisation the ancient edifice had as yet suffered. The Vicar guarded his church with jealous care. This one modern window was indeed a blemish that, when his eye rested on it painfully, reproachfully, called on his reserve of Christian charity for the patron who had put it there in memory of his deceased lady, thus honouring in death one who had been but lightly held in life.

The Vicar knelt at the communion rails, near the upturned soles of an effigy in stone carved so many years ago that the once pointed fingers of the hands joined in prayer had lost any semblance of form. Every morning, winter and summer, he said his prayers at this spot. In winter he might be pardoned if the petition moved at a somewhat brisker measure than it did this summer morning with the warm, perfumed air flowing in at the open door. Thankfulness to the Creator comes more easily in summer.

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Kneeling on the worn stones—worn by the knees of countless worshippers, from the first communion in the days of youth till the last, when husband and wife rise with the effort of stiffened joints to go home for the last time together—kneeling there, the clean-shaven, thin and somewhat ascetic face of the priest harmonised with its mediæval environment.

Meantime the dog sat outside on an undecipherable slab that covered the dust of some long-forgotten parishioner, from time to time snapping at the early fly and pricking his ears at the rustling of the birds on the dense ivy, that made such abundant cover for innumerable nests.

Joined by his master, together they passed through the churchyard and exchanged its sombre surroundings for the open expanse of meadow. On either side of the winding path that crossed it, lay, like patches of belated snow, big ox-eyed daisies, contrasting against the scarlet flowers of the dock.

The fields were golden with the glazed petals of buttercups. Here and there were ruddy patches of sorrel, white-headed moon-daisies, deep purple meadow-orchis, the amber and the bronze, the silver and tawny red of flowering grasses, and in moist corners the rich deep gold of marsh-marigolds.

The day was young, the earth beautiful, and the Vicar at peace with all mankind.

Out of the meadow they turned into a deep lane that led to the village. Down in the ditches

were masses of purple hyacinth. One caught their scent in honeyed breaths that came and went. They were sweet and pure, these flowers and grasses from the soil of the dear homeland he loved so deeply—this fragrant-breasted Mother England.

Then down the long lane he caught a glimpse of the vermilion coat of the village post-man. In his humble station he was an old and faithful servant of the State. Except at such a season of the year as Christmas, his burden was light.

The Vicar glanced at his watch. It was near breakfast hour, and he must hasten home.

"I'll take the post, William, and save your legs half a mile." The Vicarage post was rarely a heavy one. This morning there were three letters, and, yes! a fourth. It was this fourth that afterwards gave rise to William's comment that "the foreign letter seemed to set the Vicar in a maze," and he pondered over many episodes in his long life of postal deliveries where letters had brought amazement or joy and sorrow; for William had much food for philosophy, from an emotional point of view, on the receipt of letters.

Looking backward after they had parted, and the Vicar had gone his way, it appeared to William that the straight, stalwart figure, with its air of crisp enjoyment of life, had suddenly fagged and changed. "Bad news," he reflected. "Them ancient cattycombs ain't to be compared for skeletons to a postman's bag—we deal out weddings and we deal

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out woes—if there's any sort of difference between 'em," he added, cynically, for William was a bachelor.

The Vicar was full ten minutes late for breakfast—and breakfast was not an early meal at the Vicarage. Three letters of the morning's post were laid on the table. There was one for the Vicar from his son Edric at a public school. Another for the Vicar from the Head Master, a brief but not cheering epistle. Then there was the third letter for his wife. This he placed on her plate as he stooped to kiss her.

Isobel, the wife, noted with some concern that the Rev. Frank ate less heartily than usual. Yet the bacon—looking like edible autumn leaves, yellow, red-streaked, curled—raised sweet incense to the nostrils of a healthy man after a three-mile walk in the morning air.

She looked at him apprehensively. "Edric in trouble again, dear?—nothing serious, I hope."

"Oh, no—no—nothing serious. Edric seems to be born to trouble—trouble to others, that is—as the sparks fly upward. The shock of hearing he was not in trouble would be much more likely to upset one."

"Poor Edric!"

The fourth letter was in his breast-pocket, and it seemed to him that it glowed there with a heat of fire. After all these years! Just to think of it!

"Frank!"

"Yes, dear?"

"You must not worry about Edric. You know you have said he is a good lad at the core. Let me make you some beef-tea. I shall have it ready at eleven o'clock. Perhaps you have caught a chill. You surely have not given up your warm woollen socks yet? Surely not?"

"My dear Isobel, summer is here with its birds and flowers and—item—its thin socks. Don't you know it's summer?"

She looked at him curiously. "What is it—what is the matter? Is it really—really Edric, only?" She thought he bowed his head in assent. "Edric certainly is a little tiresome," she commented with a sigh.

"My dear, I shall go for a stroll and think things over. The boy is headstrong but good at heart, though he does seem to think money is of no account to us. Do not expect me till luncheon. When I am in the village I may call on Betty. Have you any message?"

"No, dear, at least not that I can think of at the moment. Oh, yes, Frank! You may tell her this—that woman we have nursed and looked after so long, the ploughman's wife at the Piggots' farm—you know the woman—she has eight children already——"

"Quite a fruitful vine, my dear."

"You may tell Betty the creature has had the impudence to have another."

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"Poor thing!" and he shook his head as he departed. "How indiscreet!" As he got to the garden gate he said to himself, with a sigh of relief, "Thank God, Isobel thinks it's only Edric or a change of socks!"

CHAPTER II

BEYOND the village High Street, past the inn, with its post and its swinging sign of "The Three Bells," a reference to the three bronze bells that hung in the belfry of the church, stood Ivy Cottage.

This cottage was the residence of Miss Elizabeth Perivale, more familiarly and most affectionately known to all and sundry in and about the village as "Miss Betty." It stood on a corner of the park land surrounding the one-time home of the Squire of Trescott. The last of the house succeeded in drinking what remained in the wine cellar—no large quantity, nor specially choice vintage—and liquidated in like manner the converted remnants of the family estate. It was now the country residence of a successful London builder, to whom solidity of structure and faithful work had something of the precious and antique quality of an Old Master.

The cottage stood back from the road with a patch of grass before it. It was built of brick, mellow-tinted in greys and reds. A brilliantly polished brass knocker adorned the door that opened directly into a low-ceilinged hall, from

which a broad easy flight of stairs led to a set of bedrooms also low-ceilinged, admirably adapted to decorative treatment, but woefully defective in ventilation. Miss Betty's dining-room was made somewhat sombre and depressing by disproportioned oil paintings of deceased Perivales, seemingly executed in bitumen and umber. There was Anne Perivale in an exceedingly virginal stomacher and mob-cap, and Peter Perivale with a white stock, or what many years ago had been a white stock, above the high-rolled collar of his bottle-green coat. Peter had a painfully stony eye. It was indeed altogether a room not to dine in if one sought to avoid dyspeptic melancholia. Miss Betty dined there as a duty she owed to the departed Anne, Peter and the rest, but the room in which she lived her life, her real life, a sunny, cheerful, and altogether wholesome life, was the one on the other side of the hall. It extended from the front to the back, so that from one end you could look over the little green and see the traffic on the road beyond. Sometimes a four-in-hand went that way with a great dash of fashion and luxury; at other times a gipsy caravan jogged past on its way to a camping-ground in the woods. It was the world's highway to Miss Betty, and through the doors at the other end lay, for her, its earthly paradise.

These doors opened outward to a little lawn trimmed as carefully as a courtier's beard. Here were Miss Betty's roses on standards as tall al-

most as herself—for she was petite—ranged like soldiers on duty. What spraying and washing and tender snipping they had undergone at her hands, and with what glorious scent-filled golden, dusky red, purple-black heads they nodded at her in the summer air! To the sun-warmed brick wall was trained a spreading Gloire de Dijon. In an angle near the lattice that cut off the paved yard with its deep well whence the bucket came up filled with ice-cold water, was a great patch of amber and bronze wall-flowers. Here the bees droned the live-long summer day, gathering in a rich harvest of honey. Beyond the standard roses was a gravelled path neatly raked—everything about Miss Betty was trim and neat—and beyond that again the strawberry bed. The trees and thicket of the woodland park filled in the back-ground, and there of a mild night in May or early June, one could hear the water-bubble trill, the jug! jug! of the nightingale. Miss Betty knew the birds in the wood as well as she did the flowers in her garden. She had, indeed, been known to write to the *Times*, announcing the early arrival of the cuckoo in Trescott Park. Such matters were of as much moment to her as the arrival of Royal infants in the great world outside her little angle.

The Vicar's rat-tat-tat on the shining door-knocker lacked its usual crispness, but it was sufficiently distinctive to apprise the little maid-of-all-work that it was Miss Betty's brother, the Vicar,

who waited admission. So, drying her hands hastily and putting her cap straight, she ran to her mistress and announced: "The Vicar, mum!" before answering the door. Miss Betty was in her garden, a sunbonnet covering her brown glossy hair, as yet untouched by grey, and a pair of well-used garden gloves on her plump white hands—good useful hands that could make and mend, cook and clean when occasion needed, hands that had nursed many a villager through sickness into health. Pulling the gauntlets off she hung the bonnet on a garden stick, then went into the sitting-room to meet her brother. She held her face up to him to be kissed, the Vicar being much the taller of the two, and noted as she did so that his eyes were grave and looked into hers with solicitude. Also, she noted that the kiss he gave her had even more tenderness than usual.

"Is anything the matter, Frank?"

"Sit down, Betty!" and he rolled from its corner a comfortable old-fashioned chair, whose defects of faded tapestry had been concealed by a flowered chintz covering. He placed it so as to command a view of the garden through the opened French doors. Then he stood behind her, resting his hands on the back of the chair.

"How many years have you been here, Bet?" She wondered why he used the shortened form of her name. It took her back to their childhood.

"Nearly thirteen, Frank. It was six months

after I returned to England—when—when you brought me home, dear.”

“Yes, it must be about that time. Isobel and I have been married eighteen years now, or thereabout. Why, Edric will be seventeen in October. How time flies! You have been happy here, sister?”

“Very happy, dear—very happy.”

“Why, Bet,” and he put his hand tenderly on her head, “there is not a grey hair—not a touch of winter frost. Yet you were twenty-two when you came here!”

“Well, twenty-two to thirteen makes but thirty-five, and I am still young—comparatively,” she added, with a smile.

He let his hand rest on her shoulder as she lay back looking up at him.

“Do you ever think of it, ever dream of it, or have you made yourself—if such making can be—made yourself forget it all?”

“Perhaps we may forgive, Frank—perhaps that is possible to some—but none of us can truly forget—not one of us.”

“Still, the bitterness of it passes away—years do not kill the memory of it, but they kill the bitterness.”

She was silent; the bitterness was not yet killed.

“If something were to happen—though I trust it may not happen, sister—still, should it happen——”

She leant forward, resting her head upon her hands.

"Frank, it is thirteen years ago—and every night of every year I have prayed, God helping me, to forgive him—but the bitterness of it has never gone—never will go."

"Still you are happy, sister. They say—all alike, churchman and dissenter, all in our little world—they say you bring sunshine with you, winter and summer, dear."

"Yes! I am happy in a way—very happy; but, Frank, have you ever wondered if I felt the loneliness of it all?"

"I thought your flowers, your pets, your village charges without number, sick mothers, out-of-work fathers, and all the rest of them——"

"You are a man, Frank; and men, especially vicars"—she looked at him with an odd smile, half of affection, half of tolerance—"especially vicars, don't understand what it means—to a woman—to be—lonely."

The Vicar looked puzzled. Bet had always seemed to be contented beyond the lot of the everyday woman. She was practical, too—practical to her finger-tips—and devout; beyond all, she was devout and, he had thought, resigned. What, indeed, was devoutness without resignation? Yet she was lonely, she said. Bet had always been complex in her nature. He was conscious of a sub-

leaven of thankfulness to the Deity that there was no complexity of nature in Isobel.

"Experience—one would have thought, dear, that experience, and such an experience——"

"There are experiences, Frank, that never teach."

"Do you mean, Bet, that you still—love him?"

"No, dear, that is dead. It was buried thirteen years ago. For that there is no resurrection of the dead; but not the less, dear, I am lonely. There! you do not understand. How could you? I am not sure that I understand it myself; but every baby I hold in my arms—every one—and, dear me! how many they have been, how many!—and I shall never have one for my very own—but there!" and she rose abruptly, "come and see my children, my beautiful roses."

"Let me stroll round by myself, Bet. I will come back when you have read this," and he held out the letter. She took it from his outstretched hand almost reluctantly, he thought, and as she read the address, her face flushed momentarily, then paled to ashen white. He took her by the arm.

"Sit down, dear. I will leave you alone to read it. God sustain you if it brings you pain—if it brings to life the dead." He turned and went into the garden, leaving her with the letter still unopened in her hands.

"La Marquise de Remusat."

The letter was addressed to the care of her brother the Vicar. So he had found her! She

opened the envelope and read the four pages of closely-written script. Though French had once been as familiar on her lips and pen as her mother-tongue, now, after these years of almost complete disuse of it, the epistolary style of her correspondent seemed curiously artificial. French, she reflected, with a touch of humour, was so essentially a language for concealing thought—the real underlying thought. It was a sort of lingual skating upon ice. Yet it had once seemed to her to be the only true medium of romance, passion, love. When she was eighteen—one is so blind, blind—dazzled with the light of the world, at eighteen. He signed himself “Your ever devoted husband.” She recalled to herself the days of their early married life when merely to live was joyous. He had held her in his arms and rained passionate kisses on her lips, her fresh girlish face, so typically English. Life had gone ill with him since those days. He was glad, so he wrote, oh! so inexpressibly glad, overflowing into superlative expressions of his gladness, that her fate had been different, that she was in comfort, indeed, he understood in luxury. She deserved it and more, much more. As for himself, he was an altogether unfortunate devil, a miserable one whom the Fates had made blind to the admirable qualities, the most excellent virtues, of a woman such as she. Would she come to him, if but for a moment? He was dying. It was indeed terrible to die thus—alone. He reproached

himself—he wept over himself in elegant phrases—he was inexpressibly wretched—he was forlorn—he was an outcast. Would she come to him that he might have forgiveness from her saintly lips, unutterable wretch, unworthy of her divine compassion?

It was an emotionally effusive and equally contemptible appeal. Yet to think of it all! This her husband! The Marquis de Remusat, once her hero, so tender, so deliciously romantic—now a billiard marker in a third-rate Paris club, to whom the whole joy of living spelt itself in drops of absinthe.

She recalled their life, the letter lying on her lap, her eyes gazing vacantly on the sunlit garden. They called it an old maid's paradise, the people who knew nothing of the years behind her. Paradise, her paradise! Why did they not more truly call it her Gethsemane, for was it not there the agony, the humiliation of it all had to be borne?

She had lost her parents when a mere girl; then was sent to a relative in France, and the relative took the convenient way of fulfilling the duties of guardianship by placing her in a convent school. They teach one in convent schools much about the world hereafter—a most excellent world doubtless; but nothing at all about the world that is—a less excellent world, doubtless. She went into it at seventeen years of age, clean, pure-minded, innocent as a child. The brave Marquis de Remusat, reputed to be without fear in the duel, though not

without reproach in a life of cynically frank self-indulgence, came across her path, some two years later. This somewhat puny, altogether dandified, and exuberantly amorous gentleman whose cash assets were no greater than a limited purse could carry, saw her, was captivated by her fresh young face, her innocence, and a suggestion of reasonably sufficient means. He proposed on his knees, weeping in the vehemence of his torrential passion, and—she married him. It was very fine, very romantic. Three years later she humbled herself to the dust and prayed her brother in England—the only creature left to her by way of kin—to come to her and take her home. Frank, her big brother Frank, came to her. The Marquis had a bad half-hour. She returned to England and settled there.

The advowson of the Vicarage had originally been annexed to the demesne of the Manor of Trescott, and her father was related to the patron, himself a bachelor. When evil days came to the Perivale branch, a place had been found for her brother Frank by presenting him to the living. In obedience to the family mandate, he had taken Holy Orders, and in due season became Vicar of Trescott. On occasion, the Rev. Frank Perivale had looked over the walls of his spiritual demesne with a sigh of longing for the more strenuous life without, but the temporal advantages of the spiritual trust were not to be despised, and soon the cares of matrimony curbed the impetuous chafing of

youth. He became a solid churchman with a somewhat contemptuous tolerance of dissent, drifted along the years with a fine assumption of clerical infallibility, and to his honour carried out the duties of his office faithfully and vigorously. He had some talent as an organiser and gained a reputation for soundness that was, if the truth were known, an attribute of mental inactivity rather than of any profound research on the Vicar's part. He spoke with the voice of authority, and the voice of authority is loudest where the limits of inquiry are narrowest. He was a well-living, earnest, conscientious man with fixed ideas. His was a mind incapable of holding faith in solution, else had the voice of authority waxed faint.

The Vicar in his stroll within the confines of the garden, having exhausted a genuine enjoyment of its perfumed contents, thought with some trepidation of this possible resurrection of a bit of family history that had been hidden from the eyes of the faithful Isobel. To his wife he had given such confidences as he thought it was meet and right his matrimonial partner should share. Confidence in this matter of Betty's *mésalliance* he did not consider was his to bestow. Till the event which led to his sister's return to England, presumably from the care of her guardian, their lives had for years been apart. The marriage was an affair of three years only. It had been contracted with the necessary consent of the guardian, but without os-

tentation. The guardian interested himself but little in the matter, and Betty, being dubious of the reception such news would meet with at the hands of the few English friends she had retained, kept her own counsel. An odd rumour here and there soon died for want of fuel. To Isobel, Miss Betty was Frank's maiden sister, nothing more. Hence the Vicar viewed with some apprehension the effect of a disclosure. It was not so much the disclosure in itself he apprehended, as the spiritual examination he would be subjected to. Was there anything more in the past that lay concealed from the wifely eye? Isobel would assuredly subject him to a most deplorable cross-examination. The time he spent in Miss Betty's paradise was certainly not one of unalloyed enjoyment.

"Frank!" Miss Betty stood at the open door with the fateful letter in her hand. When he came in answer to her call she handed it to him without comment. Together they sat on the garden seat near the sunny wall. She watched closely the expression on her brother's face as he read the pages, and noted the expression of contempt that comes into the face of a decent man for the surcharged protestations of the obvious hypocrite. The thing was overdone to the point of nausea.

"Confound the fellow!" This was strong language for the Vicar. "Of course you will throw it in the fire, Bet? Best place for it."

She looked at him, quietly, unemotionally.

"Yes, dear, I shall throw it in the fire; then——"

"Well, what then?"

"Then I shall go to him."

"Go to him!" The Vicar rose astounded.

"Betty!"

"Yes, I shall go to him," she repeated.

"Are you mad?"

"No, dear, I am not mad. It is very simple. I am his wife—and he is dying."

"I don't believe he is dying. I don't believe a word of it. He is a lying, canting——"

"Don't, dear—after all he is my husband. Nothing can change that. I can't change it; you can't, Frank. Not even God can change a fact."

"Well, if it is a fact, what of that?"

"Listen, dear. I have been here, what did we say?"

"Thirteen years."

"Yes, about that. Well, for these years we've preached and taught, you and I, that there cannot be—I mean ought not to be—any shirking of the duties that come to us. We have taken the pleasant ones. They have been nearly all pleasant ones, Frank, have they not?"

"Yes, on the whole they have."

"Well, we have taken them with open hands; now this comes to us, an ugly bitter duty. Do you tell me I should shirk it?"

"Duty! What duty do you owe him? The hound! He spoiled your life, smirched it, made

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three years of it a foul blot you cannot wipe out. Yet you talk of duty to him!"

"Not to him, that is, personally to him, but to my husband."

The Vicar looked puzzled. This was surely an over-fine distinction.

"Marriage—and you know, Frank, you have preached it times without number—is not merely a contract in law; it is something more; it is a pledge of loyalty in the presence of God."

"Yet you have——" He hesitated at the implied reproach.

"Yes, I have broken it, but now that he is dying I must go to him; I must. All these years, dear, I've been trying to drive the bitterness out of my heart, asking myself whether I ought not to have endured to the end. It seemed so cowardly to shirk one's cross—and perhaps had I been a better woman I could have won a way out for him, a way out for us both. Now he calls me. Yes, I know it is like the cry of a spoilt child. I know that what he says of his love is all a lie, a mean lie, but he is my husband. That is my fact."

"Think it over to-night, Bet. Perhaps when you think it over quietly you will see it in a different light."

She shook her head. "All the thinking in the world won't change the fact. I am his wife."

Then the Vicar looked gloomily at the sky, pursed his lips and rubbed his smooth-shorn chin.

He thought of Isobel and Isobel's reproaches, and Isobel's distant air and her manner of walking, as it were far apart from him, in melancholy isolation, at times of misunderstanding. Then further he thought that the Deity might overlook a curse on the head of the Marquis de Remusat, so he cursed him heartily. And this being done, he looked again at his sister, and remembered the day when he went forth as a knight to rescue her from a dragon, and doing so, the impetuosity of old days revived.

"I'll go with you, Bet. You shall not go alone. When is it to be?"

"By the night mail to-morrow!"

"He has sent you the address?"

"Yes, in an enclosure. He gives a little sketch of the street, though it is not named. We shall find it, no doubt. I have not forgotten my Paris yet. He asks me to write to him at the Poste Restante. I had better do so at once, then it will catch to-night's mail and he will expect us."

He nodded acquiescence.

"What of Isobel, Frank? Have you thought of her?"

"My dear, I have done little else than think of Isobel."

"Tell her everything."

"Thanks, Bet. You see, it has never been my affair. Still if we do not tell her, all the way will be lies, for a lie breeds other lies without ceasing.

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When it all came out—as it would some day—
then—well, you don't know Isobel as I do.”
“Good-bye, I shall be ready when you call for
me.”

CHAPTER III

WHEN the Vicar returned after the appointed hour he found the faithful Isobel waiting him in the study with beef-tea and reproaches. She had an unhappy habit of discounting her good deeds by complaints or reproaches, consequently the parishioners as well as her household viewed her benefactions with mixed feelings. However, the Vicar's mind was so fully engaged with the matter he and Miss Betty had on hand that to-day the reproaches went unheeded.

The beef-tea disposed of under the watchful eye of the wife, the Vicar broke silence.

"My dear, there is a matter I wish to speak to you about. It is, in fact, a sad story that affects one who is very close to us."

"To us?" She exclaimed, with surprise in her voice.

"Yes; affects Betty. I have not told you before, as it was a matter so closely affecting her that—er—I er—did not feel at liberty to disclose it." The Vicar was conscious of a certain awkwardness in his manner. Isobel had always been so insistent on whole-hearted confidence between husband and

wife that he felt himself to be hazarding his matrimonial repute in the confession of a withheld episode in the family life.

"It is strange you have not told me before, Frank. Between husband and wife——"

"Yes, of course, my dear, between husband and wife there should be a—er—complete revelation of self."

"Complete!" she reiterated, with a touch of chill in her voice.

"In this case, however, the revelation concerns the life of another. I venture to think a differentiation must be made in such a case."

"Well?"

"Well, Betty has suggested that you should be told everything."

"That is very gracious of her—very."

"This, briefly, is the story: We two, Betty and I, were left without our parents at a very early age and very early separated, she being sent to a relative in France, I to one in England. I remained in England, she in France, till we attained maturity. For years we saw little of each other. Betty was educated in a convent school, and though I once visited her at her guardian's home, she never as a matter of fact left France till I brought her home—here. So much I believe you know. After leaving the convent she spent a long holiday with the parents of some of her school companions. There she met a certain Marquis de Remusat, a descend-

ant of one of the old émigré families who subsequently returned to France to find that the promised restoration of the family estate was a promise more easily made than fulfilled. Legal complications seem to have ended in the practical ruin of the family, so far, at least, as its financial resources were concerned. The Remusats for a couple of generations past have been neither less nor more than aristocratic adventurers. Betty is still a charming woman, but when I saw her on the one visit I have spoken of, she was a beautiful girl, with a certain independence of character combined with an almost child-like trust in the world at large. Her French associations had grafted on to her British phlegm a somewhat romantic outlook on life. Poor little Bet! She fell an easy prey to this impecunious aristocrat, with his fine manner and Gallic exuberance of expression. He on his part was by no means the disinterested lover whose rôle he so dexterously played. Betty's guardian was a widower, a rich man and childless. There was every expectation that his fortune would pass to my sister. It was tacitly understood such would be the case. Had it indeed come to her it would have far exceeded the average portion with which French parents endow a daughter on her marriage day. The Marquis, with the instinct of the gambler, took the chance of the possibly greater prize. He declared his love to my sister, and she accepted him. It was of course necessary to have the guardian's con-

sent, and this was obtained without trouble. He was an elderly man, to whom the gratification of personal pleasures was the chief object in life. No doubt, too, he was not unwilling to wash his hands of the care of a young girl, whose charge, now that her education had been completed, would have been more or less an embarrassment to him. Approached delicately by the Marquis on the subject of a settlement on his ward, he avoided it by a vague reference to probable expectations. He, however, made her a generous nuptial gift, and they were married. The marriage, by the way, was a very quiet affair—not even I being a guest. A year later the guardian was captured by a lady from the Folies Bergère.”

“A theatre?”

“Yes, a theatre of a kind, and a lady of a kind. The guardian is now repenting in the modern equivalent for sack-cloth and ashes somewhere in the south of France. The wife having disposed of the fortune to her liking, departed for other fields. The Marquis was desolated, to adopt his own expression, and the incident of my sister’s *mésalliance* consequently became almost tragic. A piteous letter from her, the first she had written to me during her brief married life, took me to Paris.”

“That was the spring holiday you took, the first without me?” interposed Isobel.

“I confess, my dear, it was. Well, I found her in extreme poverty. Her husband earned a pre-

carious livelihood at a well-known gambling-hell, and spent it on himself. Betty had a small annuity under our mother's will. On this, or such portion of it as she could retain from her husband, she lived. It was mere existence. From callous indifference the Marquis passed to active cruelty; and when I found her it was to rescue her from bodily ill-treatment. She fled from the miserable home, and I brought her here."

Isobel, in the interest awakened by the recital, almost forgot her personal pique at this withheld confidence of her husband. "Poor Betty! To think all this dreadful story should lie behind her quiet life."

"Yes! Bet is a brave little soul, and good as God makes good women, but——"

"Yes?" and Isobel unconsciously prepared herself to hear of some lapse from this high standard of womanhood.

"To-day, after thirteen years of silence, she received a letter from the Marquis."

"Oh!" and there was the faintest trace of disappointment in Isobel's voice.

"He is in the direst poverty, a billiard-marker at some club, and says he is dying. I hope there is no lack of Christian charity in venturing on the speculation of a lie. Frankly, I believe it is a lie, but Betty——"

"Well, what does Betty say?"

"Betty says she must go to him. He is her hus-

band. The——” and here the Vicar paused with a secret regret for the limitation to emphatic forms of speech imposed by Holy Orders. “The man wants her forgiveness on his death-bed. He is a liar, Isobel, an infernal, canting humbug!” There are limitations that break down at crucial moments.

“My dear Frank!”

“Yes, I know, my dear—you are quite right; of course one ought to control one’s self. But if I didn’t say it, I’d think it. However, Betty is bent on going to him—rank folly—and you see I’ve been preaching that sort of doctrine so many years, till—till Bet has come to believe it.”

Isobel looked shocked at the Vicar’s momentarily frank avowal.

“You mean?” she questioned.

“I mean the sacredness of the marriage contract. She says it is her duty to go to him.”

“‘Those whom God joins,’ ” began Isobel, sententiously.

“Yes, yes!” said the Vicar, somewhat impatiently. “That is the orthodox assumption, of course, but——”

“But what?”

The Vicar evaded a direct answer. “Well, she accepts it. She is determined to go to him. And,” this with an effort, “I am going with her, of course.”

“Why ‘of course’? Is it necessary?”

"It is. She is my sister. There were but the two of us. I could not let her go alone."

"You may be mixed up in a scandal!" To Isobel, association with a scandal was worse, many degrees worse, than a sin.

"Can't help it, dear." The Vicar's determination crystallised itself into curt sentences. "I've got to go. She is my sister."

To Isobel this was one of the new phases of a husband's nature that crop up just as the wife thinks she has exhausted them all. Intuitively she recognised that argument was excluded.

"When do you leave, Frank?"

"By the night mail for Dover to-morrow. We shall go up to London by the midday express."

"How long do you expect to be away?"

"That of course will be determined by circumstances. Will you pack my valise, dear? There will be so much to attend to—let me see, the weekly meeting of the Young Men's Bible Class—that Ruthven can attend to; and I must write a note of apology to the St. Ives' Dorcas Society—it is their annual meeting, and——" the Vicar enumerated a number of other engagements. "And please, Isobel, pack my tweed suit—the old one, you know. It may be better for me not to attract attention as a clergyman." To all this the faithful Isobel dutifully inclined her ear.

Between them, the Vicar and curate arranged the details to be seen to in the former's absence,

32 THE BISHOP'S SCAPEGOAT

whilst the valise was being packed with such care and foresight to the Vicar's need, that he might have campaigned in Central Africa for a month and have had all that civilisation deems necessary to the decencies of life.

Betty received a brief visit from her sister-in-law, and together they had a comfortable cry.

The care of the cottage and its pets during the owner's absence was placed in trustworthy hands, and the express train which made its one intermediate stoppage at the neighbouring town of St. Ives was caught with at least twenty minutes to spare, a wise precaution observed in all provincial places.

In London they had a few hours to spare before leaving by the night mail from Victoria Station. Miss Betty spent the time in some necessary shopping whilst the Vicar went to an old friend's chambers at Lincoln's Inn. When he left the chambers he had exchanged his clerical attire for a suit of grey tweeds.

They crossed the Channel to Calais, and the following day reached Paris, where they secured apartments in a quiet old-fashioned family hotel not far from the Rue de Rivoli.

The Vicar insisted on a few hours' rest before they set out on their quest. Consequently the day was well advanced before they reached the Rue de Cloître St. Merri, off the Rue St. Martin. This was the point indicated in the roughly-drawn sketch

enclosed by the Marquis as the starting-point for his abode. They went down the street, leaving the Eglise St. Merri on the right, as far as the Rue Brise Miche. Here for a time they became hopelessly entangled in the wandering, erratic thoroughfare, with its maze of intersecting lanes. Their destination was marked as the third lane to the left of the Rue de l'Homme Armé, and the seventh house. Evening was closing in as they reached the entrance to the squalid lane. The neighbourhood was so uninviting in its atmosphere and rough class of residents, that the Vicar, with Miss Betty pressing close to his side, once half determined to beat a retreat with the intention of returning to the place in the full sunlight of the following morning. However, they had got so far, it seemed a pity to abandon the search, so they went down the filthy lane, reeking with the odours of that old Paris which for the greater part has since been rebuilt. They counted the houses with some difficulty; the place seemed to be an agglomeration of dilapidated architecture.

"This must be the seventh house," said the Vicar. They stood before a tunnel-like entrance that apparently ended in blank darkness. A vile stench of mouldy decay and corruption issued from it. There was no concierge, unless the ragged gamin who ran out almost under their feet were he. They heard the squeak and scurry of rats.

Betty's courage almost failed her. One may face

cannon—one may face even such a sublimation of stench as issued out of this foul, cavernous passage—but a rat! It was meet indeed that she should take her courage in both hands, poor Miss Betty! However, having come thus far, she would not now retreat.

"The stairway to the right as far as the first floor," repeated the Vicar, who had committed the directions to memory by reason of frequent reference to the rude chart on the way thither. "Here we are!" A dim light indicated it, and a puff of warm, sickly air greeted them.

"Phew!" said the Vicar, "what a vile hole!" Together, with frequent stumbles, they climbed the worn stone steps till they arrived at the first floor.

"Now number three to the left," continued the Vicar. "Keep up, Betty. We're just there. One, two, three! Here we are." He rapped at the door. No answer. Again he rapped, this time more loudly.

They heard a thin, high-pitched voice reply with a somewhat nasal intonation, "Entrez!"

The Vicar pushed open the door and they entered. A smoking oil lamp made the darkness of the room seem, if anything, more obscure than it would have been lit only by the closing rays of daylight that struggled through the patch of window space, grimy and uncurtained.

From a bed in a corner of the low-ceilinged room came the quick nervous voice of its occupant.

"Is that you, Bettina? Ah! So you have returned to me—but with M'sieur, your brother. What does this mean, *chérie*? Is it not enough that I am your husband—that I am a dying man? Is Madame afraid of a dying man?"

"You sent for me. I have come to you, Edmond. You would not have me come alone to such—to such a dreadful place."

"Madame is accustomed to her comforts, I understand, whilst the poor devil of a husband may die like a rat in a hole." Here he was seized with a violent paroxysm of coughing. When he recovered he lay back for a while, his withered face, still showing signs of a once handsome profile, resting on a soiled pillow.

"Come here, *chérie*! Will you not embrace your husband? I beseech the forgiveness of la Marquise—for the past. Let it be forgotten. Madame is capable of great Christian charity to the penitent, the dying. Is it not so?" He spoke with some trace of dignity.

Miss Betty resolutely overcame the momentary sensation of nausea and repulsion that came to her. She bent and kissed him on the forehead.

"My beloved, on the table beneath the window you will find the medicine. Give it to me. I am exhausted. This cough tears one to pieces. M'sieur le Curé, you are very good to come thus far with Madame my wife. Pardon my want of hospitality. May I ask you to pass me my dressing-gown? It

is on the wall yonder. I will rise. No, no! I do not need assistance."

Miss Betty went to the table and commenced to measure out the prescribed dose whilst the Vicar crossed the room to bring the gown. One could not be churlish to a dying man. Seemingly it was not a lie, after all. As he put his hand out to reach the ragged garment he heard a rapid movement, a click at the door. With the alertness of alarm he turned. The bed was empty. Then he looked at the door and saw the Marquis bowing gravely to him.

"M'sieur and his charming sister, my adored wife the Marquise de Remusat, are my guests. Be assured, my friends. No, no! there is no need for a demonstration."

The Vicar made a quick step forward. He faced a duelling pistol. The Marquis remarked with an accentuated drawl, a laboured assumption of high courtesy: "M'sieur le Curé will not incommode himself. It is but a poor hospitality I have to offer him, but it is all his. Will M'sieur be pleased to seat himself, for lack of better accommodation," and he shrugged his shoulders, "on the bed? The poor devil of a husband! My faith, he is *in extremis*, eh?" He laughed, a suggestion of triumph in the mocking voice. "I would regret to constrain M'sieur, but——" he moved the weapon in his hand with just the suggestion of significance.

Betty, surprised in the act of pouring the medi-

cine into the stemless bowl of a wineglass, stared at the two men in silent apprehension. Why did she ever believe him? A thought of her home, her peaceful room, the warmth, the light, the security of it, and this! She felt her limbs tremble. It was a trap—she saw it all—a trap.

The Vicar, the momentary shock passed, came to himself. He was afterwards surprised at this quick reaction. Unlike his sister, his thoughts never for a moment threw back; they were all present. He must outwit this man. To do it, and how to do it! He had no other thought. Meantime he walked across the room and seated himself on the bed.

"Madame also will, I trust, be seated—on the box. Alas! my apartments are but poorly furnished. We shall call a family council, eh?" As for himself he remained standing a few paces from the door.

"May I again thank M'sieur, my esteemed relative, for accompanying Madame on her long and most wearisome journey? She has, at last, returned to her duty—and her home." He indicated the home with a dramatically graceful wave of the hand. "There was a time when the Remusats——" He smiled with a touch of cynical humour as he again glanced round the miserable room. "However, Madame will no doubt find means to decorate the apartments more in harmony with her rank. As for M'sieur le Curé, I shall not detain him

longer. Doubtless he desires to dine, and it is already past the hour."

"What do you mean, Edmond? My brother will remain."

"What do I mean, chérie? Is it not perfectly clear? You are my wife, you are in France. I am your husband. I demand that you remain here—in your home—Madame la Marquise."

"Frank!"

"M'sieur will please remain seated. This is a part of Paris where things happen. Many things happen. We bear our misfortunes in silence. We have so much in common. You see it is wise. If M'sieur is indisposed to be reasonable, well, it is deplorable, but——"

The Vicar looked at him, and looked also at the duelling pistol. If the fellow were only a little closer—but he kept at arm's-length.

"I am glad to see my esteemed relative is reasonable. It is a very good thing to be reasonable in season. Now M'sieur will be so kind as to retire. I wish to be alone with Madame my wife."

He went to the door, unlocked it, drew it open to the dark passage-way without, then stood aside with courteous inclination.

The Vicar rose as if to go. Though without any formulated plan, he had no real intention of going; but Betty, on the impulse of the moment—not stopping to think of the lack of faith in her brother implied by the words—cried: "Frank! Frank! you

will not leave me?" She made a movement to him, and the Marquis sprang to her side—there was a cat-like agility in the action.

"You are my wife—by the law you are mine. If you stir I shall kill you, Bettina!" He grasped her by the arm roughly, and drawing her to him, repeated: "I shall kill you if you stir one step, my wife! One step!"

"Frank! Frank!"

Then the Marquis knew no more of this world's vicissitudes. He had given the Vicar his opportunity. He struck him on the face. The pistol was wrenched from his grasp, a not too muscular grasp, by the way, and he lay on the ground with the Vicar's right hand on his gullet. The grip held him there till his eyes, that seemed to be bursting from his head, saw no more.

"Frank, are you mad? Let go, let go! Don't you see—you are killing him!"

But the brute-beast stirred in the Vicar, and he gripped the closer, a guttural note in his voice. "You devil!"

"For the love of God, Frank, let go, let go!" she cried.

Then, panting from the strength of his rage, sweat beading his white face, ugly with passion, the Vicar let go his grip in the slow retraction of intense muscular effort. He sat on the ground by the side of the man, incapable for the moment of realising what he had done.

Betty with a cry ran to the door and closed it. Then she threw herself on the foul bed, heedless of its uncleanness, and burst into dry, hysterical sobs.

A quarter of an hour later, having lifted the inanimate body of the Marquis to the bed and covered it with a sheet, as if he lay asleep, the two crept down the dingy staircase, brother and sister side by side, close in guilt and fear. Night had come, and they wandered blindly on through the filthy alley, along the winding street, till it might be, an hour later, perhaps less, perhaps more, for time had ceased to run, they came to the Boulevard St. Martin, its lights and movement. But they saw no lights, they marked no movements of a crowd—they saw only the distorted face of the dead staring at them from the shadows of a squalid room.

CHAPTER IV

ERNEST BERTRAND, Doctor of Medicine, hearing no response to his repeated knock, pressed against the door of the third room on the first floor and found that it yielded to his pressure. So he entered.

"Pasquier! Pasquier!" He moved forward a couple of paces, and in the dim light of the smoking lamp saw him lying on the bed.

"What the devil! Come, get up! Rouse yourself, my friend. It is I, the Dr. Bertrand." But though he shook him by the shoulder, and somewhat roughly, Pasquier did not move. He shook him again and yet he gave no sign of consciousness. Then the doctor walked across the room and brought the vile-smelling lamp to the bedside. He held it close to Pasquier's face, and with the free hand felt his pulse.

"Mon Dieu! he is dead!" He put the lamp on the floor, and knelt on one knee by the bedside. With the almost involuntary action of the professional man, he unloosed the shirt and put first his hand and then his ear above the region of the heart. He felt the lower limbs. They were still warm,

and again and yet again he bent over and put his ear to the white flesh. If he had his stethoscope it would be easier, he reflected. Then again he bent to listen. Far, far away, it seemed to him he could hear a faint pulsation. Was he indeed dead?

Then Ernest Bertrand, Doctor of Medicine, sat at the foot of the bed and, with hands clasped between his knees, thought it out. Truly, he might not be dead now; half-an-hour hence he would assuredly be dead—and being dead, a great load would be lifted from the back of Ernest Bertrand. The foul beast! He had been like the old man of the fable to him, a heavy burden to carry everywhere—yes, everywhere! Not that it mattered, indeed, but for Cecile. It was for Cecile he bore it. Was it expected of him that he should bring this piece of devil's carrion back to life again—to live his foul life for years to come, year after year, and he, Ernest Bertrand, carry him on his back forever, so that he might keep the secret from Cecile? After all, it was not his affair. Had he not come that night the man would have died. Why should he interfere? It would be almost a miracle if he could bring him back. He had done some things in his time. He was reputed clever. He was indeed clever. He could do it, for he had faith in himself. It would be magnificent to bring him back. Heaven! what an inspiration to rescue one's enemy in such fashion! But if the beast died it would be peace to him—Cecile would never know.

He could leave him alone—that was all he need do. Then he would secure the letters; they were in the room somewhere, must be; he had seen them there. So! he would burn them; and the man dead, there would be peace for him and Cecile—Cecile, his little one.

He would not interfere. It was God's affair. Why should he interfere in His plans? The man was as good as dead. What would it profit to interfere? He was better dead. It was better for himself, better for all.

Then he turned and looked at him again. There were strange marks on his neck. With awakened interest he examined them more closely. Yes, surely, surely Pasquier had been choked—murdered. It was so—no, it was not possible for a man to kill himself thus. He was murdered—without doubt—murdered!

For a minute the shock of this discovery drove all else from his mind. Then slowly he realised that he was there alone with a murdered man. At any moment someone might come and demand an entrance. Or he might be seen leaving—and then there was such excellent reason why he, Bertrand, should kill this man who had preyed on him year in and year out. He rose, and with an influx of fear looked nervously at the uncurtained window. Across the lane there was also a dimly lit window, a stained yellow blind obscuring it. He saw a blurred shadow cross it now and again, and heard

the querulous crying of a child. It was doubtless a mother with a sick babe. If she raised the blind she could see him moving in the room. He endeavoured to draw a tattered curtain across Pasquier's window, but it was rotten with age and tore at the touch. However, he would be quick about his work. Where in the name of the dark one did Pasquier keep his papers? He tried the contents of a box in the corner. Not there. Then he looked under the bed and found another box—yet not there. Perhaps he carried them with him. He moved the body and searched among the clothes. Still he failed to find them. At last! They were wrapped in an old piece of cloth under the straw mattress.

He put the lamp on a box and sat on the floor to read them. So! he was not the only victim. There were some revelations here. He recognised familiar names. It was a great temptation, but he would not read such letters. They were compromising, doubtless. This little packet—the topmost letter was without an envelope—one could not help reading a line or two. It was very pitiful—after ten years of peace, she said, her two boys at school, the husband so good to them all; she would give—— Ah, well, he would not open it and read the rest. Heaven! to live thus on the life-blood of men and women. It was good that Pasquier should die. He would not save him by lifting the little finger. Peste! He also was

this Marquis de Remusat—it must be so—to whom so much correspondence was addressed in English, too. His own! At last, nearly at the bottom of the packet. He would glance through them. How long, how long ago! The ink was faded brown, the writing faint, yet he could recall himself a young man. He had been married two years, two bitter years, when he met Eugénie. The English fashion was better—he heard that in England it mattered nothing if the woman brought no marriage portion. The parents did not arrange these matters as they do in France. How could a man love a woman ten years his senior and as cold as marble? She died, and then Eugénie came into his life. They married. She was as joyous as a day in Spring, a day when the warm air plays through the flowering chestnuts. It was nearly eighteen years ago, but he could feel her lips on his, her arms around his neck. She laughed divinely with notes like a bird in the woods—and then one day he went into the white, dainty room—Eugénie was ravishingly neat and chic—and there the bright eyes looked into his and he heard her laugh low—with a sound of distance in it, ah! indeed, distance—as she lifted the lace handkerchief and showed him the little Cecile lying there close in the warmth of her young mother's breast.

These were the letters, one, two, fifteen of them. There were others of course, but not with this devil Pasquier. But for this man it might all

rest with the dead. Such a picture might Cecile have had in her memory of the dead mother, with no taint of after days, those after days when Eugénie drifted from him. What could a man do with such a woman as she became? What, indeed? He could not forget Eugénie when she first came to him, and he forgave much for the memory of those days. But one could not endure all things. These letters, if they came to Cecile's eyes, would kill her love for him. No love could withstand an appeal from a mother who with such devilish ingenuity cast the whole burden of her sins upon her husband—on him, Bertrand—who, God could testify, had borne with her till human nature could bear no more. Now he could destroy them. He would destroy all—every one. That poor Madame with the two sons at school, she would no longer suffer. These others, they would have peace also.

Thus reflecting, the Doctor looked about him for the means by which to destroy the contents of the package. In a corner of the room was a small charcoal brasier used for heating the room. A handful of fuel still remained in it. The Doctor lit it, and fed the fire sheet by sheet till the tiny flame was so smothered with carbonised fragments that he found it difficult to destroy the few last remaining letters. However, he succeeded, and when the last of the torn fragments flashed into momentary flame and was destroyed, he rose thankfully to his feet before the brasier. His task was accom-

plished. He would go silently away and leave the past with the dead. He went to the bedside, raised the lamp, and examined Pasquier again. Once more he uncovered him and put his ear to the flesh. He remained thus for some seconds, then lifted his head satisfied. He was dead now—beyond doubt. There was no recalling the miserable one. As he rose to his feet he cast his eyes on the window. The light was out in the house opposite. The child had ceased crying quite a time ago. He was about to extinguish the lamp, and lifted it to the level of his chest; thus its light fell full on his face. He remembered the action afterwards in all detail. Then, having laid the quenched lamp on the box dimly discernible by the vague light that filled the window space, he turned to go. The room was poisonous with smoke from lamp and burning fragments. He would let it out lest it might penetrate along the passage-way and cause inquiry. To do this he went to the window and opened it. This was the moment he became conscious of a feeling of apprehension. It was not the darkness nor the dead. He was accustomed to be in the presence of the dead. It was an intuitive fear, coming whence he knew not.

The overhang of the old houses in this quarter brought the opposite window quite close to Pasquier's. One could have almost jumped across the intervening space. As the Doctor opened the

— window his eyes fell on the opposite space. It was all dark, as he had noticed before, but as he had not noticed before, not noticed till now, when, the light of the lamp extinguished, he could see what lay beyond the room, a man stood there. He could distinguish the outline, see the place for the head, and saw or imagined he saw, a pale light to mark the eyes. How long had the man been there?

Bertrand thought he moved, as they stood there silently staring at each other. Then he heard a woman's voice calling, and the figure disappeared.

The Doctor was fully cognisant of the compromising position in which he would stand if the man had seen all. It would be wise to leave at once, without giving further opportunity for observation of his movements. He paused for a minute to draw a corner of the foul coverlet over the dead man's face and pull the head of the bed towards the ledge of the window, thus breaking the line of sight when morning came. Then he went noiselessly down the stairway and along the rat-infested passage to the lane.

As he gained the lane, he looked apprehensively to right and left of him, but saw no one in sight. In the Rue Brise Miche he paused for a moment in the light from the open door of a cheap restaurant to consult his watch, and as he did so a man passed close to him, almost touching his arm, and stared him full in the face. It was an evil face,

pallid, unwashed and with heavy brute eyes. Instinctively he thrust his watch in his pocket. He had momentarily forgotten the neighbourhood he was in.

It was late when Dr. Bertrand reached his home at Passy; but late as it was a stranger stopped to note the house and learn from the concierge that the gentleman was Ernest Bertrand, Doctor of Medicine. Then he turned on his heel as if his quest were at an end.

Cecile was in bed. They occupied the whole of the ground floor, he and the little one. The principal apartment was his consulting room. It was well furnished and comfortable. The Doctor sat down, lit a cigarette and for a while lived in the dead past, recalled to him so vividly by the letters he had burned that night. Cecile was safe now. It was well.

CHAPTER V.

THEY stayed for two days in Rouen, taking the longer route home, thus to give themselves a breathing space. Two dream days. Never afterward could they recall them with the sense of reality. Two days in which there was built up between them an impalpable wall of silence, a wall to last for years, ever present, and neither daring to destroy it. Life took on a new aspect to them. In those two days they wandered through the ancient city, along its streets and down by the traffic of the riverside, in and out with listless apathy. The Vicar would often stand gazing vacantly till she touched his arm, and coming back from his thoughts, would move on again. They reached Dieppe and crossed to Newhaven. On the way the Vicar minutely searched the newspapers for news—his heart beating with increased pulsation as he turned the pages. There was the customary record of the daily death toll. The second day there was a brief record of a murder, whether by violence or poison the autopsy had not yet disclosed, of a man named Pasquier, a rascal who lived by infamous means. The supposed murderer, who had been

seen at his awful task by a workman living in a neighbouring house, was one Ernest Bertrand, a Doctor of Medicine, a man of some distinction, with a practice in Passy. The locality of the murder was a street unknown by name to the Vicar. There was also a more sensational account of the murder of a mistress—a woman well known to a section of the public—by her lover. Another briefer account of a brutal murder of a wife by her drunken husband. But not a line in all these records could he connect with the death of Remusat. As he read each paper he passed it to his sister, and she, with equal eagerness, sought in its pages for any disclosure of the crime.

After their return the Vicar went up to London, presumably on parochial business, but in truth to search the files of the Paris newspapers at an agency office for any trace of what had happened, but could find none. Casually he came upon a note that the murderer of the man Pasquier had practically admitted his guilt when under examination by the Juge d'Instruction. The motive he would not disclose. Some family history doubtless, it was suggested, as a quantity of burnt paper had been found in a brasier in the dead man's room. But not a word about what the Vicar sought. When he returned, his sister met him at the station, and his eyes told her all she needed to know.

To Isobel the Vicar had briefly described the meeting between the Marquis and his sister. The

man had spoken truly when he said death was at hand. He was *in extremis* and had died whilst they had been in Paris. They did not remain for the funeral. Isobel expressed surprise, but the Vicar said their interview had been such as to put the man outside the pale of all wifely consideration. They left him to such friends as he had—unhappy man. Still Isobel wondered that the wife, putting all the past aside, had not laid her husband in the grave, a last office to the man she had once loved. The Vicar asked what duty could she owe to such a man, and closed the conversation somewhat abruptly. Isobel thought him strangely reticent about the visit, missing the narration of minute detail so gratifying to her sex. That the visit had been a severe trial to her husband and his sister she fully recognised. Indeed, Betty seemed to have added years to her age. All the sweet content with life had vanished from her face.

And Frank, her husband! He was no longer the breezy, open-hearted, free-spoken man he had been. He smoked heavily, was strangely absent-minded, often answering her questions in a way that showed an almost discourteous want of attention. Then he slept fitfully, and rose sometimes even before the day had fully dawned. Once or twice she found herself half-suspecting that something, not wholly disclosed, lay behind that brief visit. But, then, what was there, could there be, to disclose? The Vicar had told her, though brief-

ly, the result of the interview. The Marquis had desired his wife to return to him—as his wife—but the Vicar her brother had forbidden it. She had kissed the dying man. Yes, Betty forgave him as fully as forgiveness in such a case was humanly possible. “Then you left?” she inquired. Yes, then they left. During the night the man died. Yes, they were just in time! From Sister Betty she could get no more. The two accounts agreed in all essentials.

The months went by. Almost imperceptibly to those dwelling with him the Vicar passed from robust health into invalidity. At last it became apparent that he was suffering from some ailment. His visits to his sister's cottage became less frequent. Quite a long time had elapsed since the last visit. Isobel called his attention to the fact. He said it was remiss, and he would call that day to see her. They went to the village in the afternoon, and Isobel having calls to make, left him at the cottage door. Returning earlier than she had anticipated she resolved to call for him. The front door was open and she entered the house unannounced, expecting to find them in the sitting-room. They were not there; but looking through the French doors, wide open to the rose-garden beyond, she saw them seated together. The Vicar was gazing on the autumn-tinted garden, the paths littered with the day's dead leaves. Miss Betty's hand rested on his. It was quite natural, and to

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Isobel, who was not ordinarily imaginative, merely suggested a mute companionship.

At the rustle of her dress they rose. Miss Betty's composure was forced, and Isobel noted the fact. The Vicar leaving them to talk together, strolled along the garden path. Miss Betty led her sister-in-law into the house and abruptly, almost before Isobel had seated herself, exclaimed:

"Isobel, I have wanted to speak to you about it for some time. This afternoon—it is so long since Frank called on me—it has been more obvious than ever."

"What do you mean? What is obvious?"

"Frank is ill! He wants a change, Isobel—he wants it badly. Could he not arrange through the Dean?"

"My dear, it would be possible, of course. We might go to Devon, perhaps."

"Oh, I do not mean that, not that at all. I mean a real change. I mean to leave England."

"Leave England?"

"Yes! I—I do not think he will ever be well here."

"Good gracious, Betty! What put such an idea in your head? Why, Frank is an Englishman to the core. I don't believe he would ever consent to leave England."

"I don't believe," persisted Miss Betty, "I don't believe he will ever be well here."

"Well, I'm sure!"

"Oh, Isobel, let us all go away—away to some other part of the world, far, far from here."

"Why, Betty, what's come to you, dear?" and she rose and put her arm around her. "We have left you too much to yourself of late. This is not like you, dear. You know, Betty, you have such hearty contempt for the woman of nerves."

"I had, Isobel—yesterday or the day before."

"Why, surely you are not going that way yourself?"

"Perhaps I may be," she replied, looking up at Isobel with a faint smile. "Perhaps!"

It was from this seed that in time the idea ripened in Isobel's mind that after all it might be well for Frank to go abroad. A man rusted in this old-world corner, and then there was Edric to think of. When he had finished his University course—they hoped to send him to Oxford this year—he would have to choose a profession, and the professions were so crowded in England. The little influence Frank had was local; it could help Edric scarce at all in the wider world outside. But in the new world—Australia, Canada, the Cape—there were openings for a young man with little money or influence, avenues unknown in crowded England. She had read of the lives of colonial bishops. Some were dreadful, the missionary ones, she meant, but then there were others quite like the lives of English bishops. She would talk it over with Frank. Her uncle the Dean had some influence. If Frank

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wished to go abroad, well, she would go to London and see the Dean, and as she thought of the interview, Isobel felt the warrior rising within her. Yes, she was quite capable of dealing with the Dean—indeed, with the whole Chapter.

CHAPTER VI

THE old man who kept watch at the Semaphore had not sighted a vessel other than the coasting craft for nearly a week. The day was hot. At the base of the hill on which stood the signalling station, the little town with its one main street lay sleeping in the sunlight. The iron roofs of the houses—not a chimney was to be seen—reflected the glare of the sun like many mirrors or pools of still water. Down amongst the shipping by the quay there was just the suggestion of life, but beyond a horse or two tied to the post of a store verandah, the horse itself seeking the shelter of the roof by standing on the footway, there was no token of life in the streets. It was midday in Noumea. The main street that in the evening would brighten into life with groups of military men, officials and civilians seated at little tables on the sidewalk in front of the cafés, sipping their café noir, sirop de grenadine or orgeat, chatting volubly, reading back-dated copies of *Le Petit Journal* or even *Le Temps*, was now deserted. Flies rested undisturbed on the tables, and dogs dozed beneath them.

Here and there a woolly-headed Canaque gendarme wandered listlessly down the street. All the business of this little capital of the French convict settlement was done in the early morning or the late afternoon; all the relaxation came in the evening, when the Cercle was crowded with members and the cafés filled with non-members.

The English, they say, commence colonisation with a bank, the Spaniards with a church, and the French with a café. Truly, the little town had its share of cafés. At night they and the debits were filled with music and laughter, the clinking of glasses, the shrill voices of women. But at midday the watcher at the Semaphore saw no evidence of either business or amusement in the town at his feet. The old man watching was paid to keep awake, noon notwithstanding, but at times he was sorely tempted to avoid his contract. He was insufferably tired of the view spread out before him. But to other eyes not yet become indifferent, it was very beautiful. Far in the distance one caught a glimpse of the reefs fringing the coast, and closer in the Island of Nou, where the great convict gaol of the settlement is built, and closer still the quay where the vessels unload their cargoes. Then inland, clusters of white houses, not a few roofed with the red tiles of Marseilles; and between the clusters groups of cocoanut palms, with here and there wide-branched flamboyant trees, brilliant in scarlet blossom, and beyond, the dense tropical scrub.

Backing all, rose the neutral-tinted peak of the Golden Mountain.

With afternoon came evidences of awakening life. Along the road from the Military Barracks marched with slovenly step a squad of soldiers, young, awkward, headed by a bugler. In the principal street the town crier, an official notice in one hand and a drum-stick in the other, beat his drum loudly and cried "Avis!" in a husky voice ruined by much roaring of announcements and proclamations. There were so many official proclamations in this part of the world; but, then, what would you? Such matters are the red-blood of official life.

Suddenly all was changed. Out of the slumberous town, waking once more to life, came a clamour of tongues. The signal-man no longer looked over the glass-like sheet of the sea with half-closed eyes, but stood erect and watchful as he signalled the sighting of a ship. The Canaques raised wild shrieks, and the Canaque's shriek is the most warlike of his attributes. The incoming of a ship means "ki ki," that is, food, with perhaps a little glass of the rum manufactured at the good Fathers' distillery—a prohibited indulgence. Out of the club, the cafés and the stores came men eager to learn if the expected transport had at last arrived.

She had been out many days, a sailing vessel of the old type, cumbrous, and carrying a great press

of canvas. One day added and she would have been a hundred days from port—a long voyage—a whole purgatorial existence to the unhappy wretches penned on her decks. At each side of the first deck, divided by a broad passageway, were cages for the human beasts. Evil faces, gross, animal faces, and faces with eyes filled with a dog-like pain, looked from behind the bars. There were muttered imprecations and oaths, fawning petitions, the dogged mouth of silence, and the listless face of despair. All life's possibilities of pain seemed pent in these kennels, from which a human exhalation came foul and bestial. An iron door with a small opening in it was inserted in the side of each cage. It was through this the prisoners were fed. At each end was placed a cannon with its muzzle against the bars. Thus if need be the inmates might be blown into a hell that could scarce be worse than the one they left. In two of the cages not fewer than seventy men were penned. What torments were endured by the weaker, what nightly agony some suffered who still held to fragments of a former cleanliness of soul and body, only their Creator knew! Here were young men turned old, and lined of face; matured men who came out of the cage after the ninety-and-nine days of infernal contact, grey-haired, broken, babbling idle words.

The convict ship came into port and there was a restless movement of the inmates. They tramped

up and down or pressed against the iron bars. One more day and they would leave this cursed ship. One more day and they would be free from the cage.

The vessel took some hours working her way through the reefs and islands. At last she approached her anchorage. The sun was setting, and the great square sails stood black against the warm colours of the western sky, where a long line of low-lying clouds caught the glow of crimson and rose.

The anchor splashed in the waters of the port, men were aloft furling the sails, boats were putting out from shore. The rim of the sun dipped below the line of the horizon, and simultaneously the bugles of the prison and the ship sounded the close of day.

On the morrow the human cargo was discharged. First came the marines in long boats rowed by Canaques. They formed up on shore in two lines enclosing a passageway for the convicts. To their number were added a company of armed surveillants from the island prison, and a host of native police, their frizzled mops of hair bedecked with turkey-red and feathers, their hands filled with clubs and spears. Then the cages were opened and the men let out. As they landed they were marched along the avenue till its utmost limit was reached. Kept back by the soldiers and warders, the population of the town gazed on the crowd of

miserable wretches within the line. How many lads! Pale-faced all of them, pale from the long confinement of the voyage, broken only as it had been by the daily thirty minutes of exercise. Thirty minutes of fresh, clean air in twenty-four hours was the measure. Some stood with heads bowed in shame. One wondered how they had got into such a galley as this. Others were blatant and defiant till silenced by their gaolers. All looked sick and slack. All looked hopeless. Here and there were older men, a few grey-haired and bent. There were in all some 350, young and old, strip-lings in crime and men saturated with it through and through. One giant fellow stood high above his companions as if to pinnacle an edifice of infamy, and his face was that of a fiend.

It was late in the day when the boats had finished their work and the full body of transportés could be mustered. Then bugles sounded along the line and the procession moved on its dolorous way. They were going to Montravel, a fortified camp a few miles outside the town. Later on they would be drafted to the prison island of Nou.

Cousine had been a petroleuse in the brief but vivid life of the Commune of '71, and had paid the penalty of a too active interest in politics by deportation to this southern island. In due course she had obtained official liberation and had married. M'sieur her husband was an excellent cook

whose reason for sojourn in the settlement was a trifling affair by way of the introduction of a foreign substance into soup. M'sieur's enemy had the bad grace to die in such torments as led to a very detailed and tiresome examination of the contents of his stomach. So the husband of Cousine came to live in foreign parts at the request of an inconsiderate judge. However, he was now both happy and prosperous. He also was now a libéré and with Cousine managed the business of an excellent hotel. It was as good as the club to dine at and considerably cheaper, a matter of some moment to the not too well paid officials of the island. M'sieur cooked excellent dishes over a charcoal fire and Madame presided at the head of the table. Dinner in Noumea as in Paris was the meal of the day. It was partaken of to the accompaniment of an unrestrained chatter, foreign to the subdued conversation that punctuates the courses of an English meal.

When coffee had been served, Madame lit her cigarette, the signal for the production of cigars and cigarettes by the guests. A few imperfectly Gallicised British residents brought out pipes and proceeded to cut "fills" from plugs of tobacco traded from Sydney side. Not all their years of residence in the French community could reconcile them to the iniquities of Petit Caporal.

By Madame's side was a tall fellow with a strident voice. He had been one of Rochefort's

secretaries in the days of the Commune and had followed his master into exile. Now he edited a newspaper of fiery radical announcements. He was ego personified, any lack of argument being more than amply compensated for by a voice whose roaring silenced opposition. At the opposite end of the table a group of military surgeons was gathered, their presence being indicated to sensitive nostrils by the suggestion of iodoform. It was a group in which laughter, argument and badinage rippled, dogmatised, and interchanged. The principal topic of the evening was the arrival of the transport and the disembarkation of its gruesome cargo.

To-night Olivier Thibault, familiarly known as "The Doctor," by way of an odd distinction where so many were medical men or surgeons, was less bright than usual. Ordinarily much was expected of him by way of repartee and anecdote. He was comparatively an elder in the group, but as merry of heart as the youngest "sawbones" in the little company.

"The good Doctor has an affair surely—he is so sad!" remarked one of the juniors.

"The heart or the duel—to be sad in love, surely not! Cheer up, Doctor, the devil is dead! Eh! What! Has the little sorceress with the yellow hair and cat's eyes—a thousand pardons, I mean kitten's eyes—deserted him? Ah, well, my friend, you will be so much the richer in pocket."

The Doctor leant back in his chair, poising it on two legs, and blew tobacco rings into the smoke-filled air.

"What is the affair, Doctor?" queried a chorus of young voices.

"These cocottes of the debits——" began a slip of a youth, just fresh from the schools of Paris.

"Silence, Philippe! What does a child such as you know of cocottes? No, my children, it is neither a duel nor a woman. My faith! I should have said a woman or a duel to make the sequence true. It is only a poor devil of a comrade of mine, of our own profession. Do any of you remember one Bertrand, Ernest Bertrand? He wrote—what the deuce was it he wrote, now?"

"Ah, the man who used to lecture at the Sorbonne—he was a proser, if you like."

"My dear friend, all learning is prose to you. What would you have? The whole *materia medica* done into rondeaux and triolets, my little one, eh?"

"He was insufferably dull, your friend Bertrand; but what about him?"

"It is some ten years since I last saw him—a match! Thanks!—till to-day."

"Oh, is that your man?" inquired another. "It was but yesterday I read it all in the *Petit Journal*. He murdered one Pasquier. It was like a theatre, indeed, for while he choked the life out of him a neighbour looked on the play through a window—thus—all tranquil, a little drama to himself with-

out a sou for admission. Your friend, the learned Bertrand, made but a poor defence. He admitted enough to condemn him twice over, yet the rascal protested his innocence to the last. The fellow Pasquier was no good, they say, but what would you? Is it enough to kill a man in cold blood that he is not as clean as he ought to be? Bertrand swore he did not kill him, but he admitted to the Juge d'Instruction that he had good reason to wish him dead. Then the most excellent neighbour in the stage box, he swore to it in full detail. The fellow saw your Bertrand destroy many letters—the fragments were found by the authorities. It was evident the learned Doctor had reason! He would have been 'shortened' but for our tender-hearted President. We are becoming as tender-hearted as the little Jésus, we French. Half the misérables in the island would be 'shortened,' if they had the English law."

"You say he declared his innocence?"

"Certainly! They are all innocent, these lambs they ship to us."

"Poor Bertrand! He stood in the corvée, with a string of brute beasts—may Heaven forgive me! but they are no better—pale, sickly, with dull eyes and listless limbs—a very picture of despair. To think of it—if he should be innocent, as he declares! What a seven-fold hell to suffer, eh, my friends, eh?"

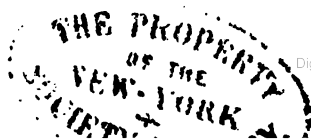
CHAPTER VII

DOCTOR THIBAUD took his seat in the lead-coloured penitentiary boat by the side of the surveillant in charge. It was the morning boat that carried official despatches to the island. The surveillant gave the word and the convict crew, two rowers to a seat, chained and dumbly servile, bent to their oars. They pulled with mechanical precision, their eyes fixed on the uniformed officer in the stern, one of his hands on the tiller, the other gripping the revolver resting on his knee.

They passed Point Picard and then the penitentiary buildings came in sight. Along the shore line ran a high wall of stone and concrete; beyond it rose a series of terraces on which stood the offices and workshops of the prison, their gabled ends suggesting a camp of tents.

Landing at a stone jetty in the little bay sheltered by the walls of the prison, the Doctor, unchallenged by the sentry on duty, made his way slowly up the steps leading to the Commandant's bureau.

The Commandant had just discarded the end of



his cigarette preparatory to opening the despatch bag placed before him, when the Doctor was announced. He followed close upon the attendant's heels; his rank as Senior Surgeon gave him the privilege of easy access to the Chief.

"Hola, Doctor! What brings you here so early?"

"Not an access of zeal, Commandant. Indeed, you may smile, though, my faith! I was not without enthusiasm in the days gone by. One enters official life an enthusiast, Commandant, one quits it a cynic. Is it not so?"

The Commandant shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly. Fortune had favoured him; he was not without his share of influence in high places. It had served him better than his brains.

They fell into a discursive conversation about matters official. It was difficult to avoid "shop" where "shop" comprehended every interest.

"What I really came to see you about, Commandant, putting these other matters aside, was a poor devil who arrived by the transport the other day—one Ernest Bertrand."

"What number?"

The Doctor consulted his note-book.

"495 C."

The Commandant noted it on a slip of paper, and sent for the prisoner's dossier. When it was brought to him, he ran his eye over the official record. "Ernest Bertrand, Doctor of Medicine,

condemned to death, sentence commuted to penal servitude for life. Offence, the murder of one Pasquier, baptismal name unknown." He summarised the rest in brief sentences. "In practice at Passy; for some time a lecturer at the Sorbonne; widower; one child, a daughter; lived a secluded life; motive for the crime not disclosed, apparently to secure possession of compromising documents; fragments discovered in murdered man's room; commission of crime witnessed by neighbour through window of adjacent house. Prisoner declared innocence, but under examination admitted, as a medical man, moral responsibility for death."

The Commandant wrinkled his brows. "Mon Dieu! What next? Your friend Bertrand is—what do you call it—a pseudonyme, eh?"

It was the Doctor's turn to look puzzled. He drew a bow at a venture and suggested "psychologist."

The Commandant grunted. "So! It will do. He is that—as you say. He plays a little game with himself. To murder! It is too coarse for the fine feelings of this M'sieur Bertrand. Well, my friend"—and putting the papers aside, he rolled a cigarette—"what would you?"

"First of all, Commandant, I want permission to see him—and alone."

"That is easily arranged. You can see him professionally—alone, if you say it is necessary. There is no difficulty about that."

"None beyond the fact that he is not in my division."

"It can be arranged. What next?"

"Commandant, this man Bertrand was a comrade of mine. I was a young surgeon and he my senior. We became close friends. There are good reasons why I should help him. Once he rendered me a service—a service of silence—the silence that covers up a mistake. It was a mistake such as it is not good for a young surgeon to make. An indiscretion, my friend. In youth we take great risks, we are infallible. When we are past youth we take no risks at all and we know nothing. We cease to instruct the *bon Dieu*," and a faint smile crossed his face. "I owe him a debt of gratitude for his silence. There are little ways in which you, my Commandant, may lighten the burden for this man."

"We shall see. I shall keep my eye on him. Perhaps later on he may be put in concession."

"He is middle-aged—and knows practically nothing about the land or cultivation."

"Well, he may find employment in Noumea or Bourail, or the mines."

"Not the mines!"

"Well, not the mines. We shall see. Now, my good Doctor——" and the Commandant indicated the yet unopened bag upon his desk. Then, as the Doctor rose, he handed him a tersely-written authority admitting him to the cell of "495 C."

The surveillant to whom the Doctor handed the Commandant's authority for admission to the prisoner, led the way past the ateliers, noisy with the bustle of active life, to the gate of the massive prison, along whose corridors the sound of their feet striking the paved way, accentuated a dismal silence. The Doctor, used as he was to the environment of the prison, could not suppress a sigh of compassion for the inmates of the cells on either side.

"How long has '495 C' been here, Surveillant?"

"Three weeks, M'sieur. He has three months of solitude to do. After that it will rest with the Commandant what we shall make of him. As to the solitude, it is part of the sentence. My faith! It takes the devil out of them, all right. They are lambs after three months of it. For a week maybe they are brazen, the devil looks out of their eyes. Ah, well, after three months they would lick your boots. It is a great medicine, M'sieur le Docteur."

They stopped at a cell near the end of a corridor, and the surveillant, unlocking the padlock, drew back the bolt of the cumbrous door. As it swung open, the noisome pent-up air escaped.

The Doctor entered. "You may leave us. Return in half-an-hour."

As a surgeon on the staff, the Doctor was privileged in this respect; and the door was closed on him and the prisoner.

"Bertrand! You do not recognise me? How indeed could you in this dim light?"

The prisoner lay on a sloping board about three feet broad and six in length, his heels resting against a slat. As the visitor entered he partly raised himself on his arm, then returned to his recumbent position.

"I do not know you!"

"Recall in your memory ten years ago. It is the operating theatre. The nurse has counted the sponges. 'There ought to be six,' she persists. 'No, no, five!' cries the surgeon. He is young—he has not come to his work with the nerve we get later on. So the wound is sewn and the patient is taken back to the ward. One night, my friend, you will surely remember it, the young surgeon is smoking with you in your room when suddenly he rises. 'Bertrand, there were six! She was right—there were six!'—and the patient had died that night. There was no autopsy, because, Bertrand, I bought the nurse. Ah, but she made me pay for it, my friend—and you, you were silent."

"Thibault!" The figure rose from its bed of pain, and in the twilight of the cell felt for a hand.

"Ah, Bertrand! I hold it again in mine! That is well. You saved me, my friend. It is not a thing one lightly forgets."

"The patient was dead, Thibault—what would it have served to expose you?"

"Yes, you put it so, to lighten my debt to you."

You put it thus at the time—but a man does not rub out a score so easily as that. Bertrand, come here! near the light! Raise your face so! Ten years only since we parted, and so greatly changed, you might be an old man, indeed you might, so grey, so lined! What is it?"

"Not years, Thibauld—but months, months that indeed might be years and spent in hell. Oh, Thibauld——!"

He leant against the wall of the cell and covered his face with his hands, as if ashamed of the childish sobs that broke through his lips.

"Come, sit down, my friend, sit down." They sat together on the floor—there was no other place, the sloping board was impossible.

"Tell me all. There! compose yourself. Of this crime, are you truly——"

"Innocent, Thibauld! See, I shall tell you everything. You shall judge for yourself, my friend: When first we met—some fifteen years ago, was it not?"

"Yes, thereabout."

"I had then been married—in second marriage—some years. We had one child, our little Cecile. She was born to us the year following our marriage. It is not so frequent with us French that a woman becomes a drunkard, but there are cases. My wife was unfitted for the life we led. I was much away from home, at the hospitals and attending sick calls. It was all I could do to meet

the demands of our little home—so I left Eugénie much alone—too much—though, indeed, I loved her deeply. She was younger than I, and also accustomed to much society in her father's home, though, indeed, she had been educated by the Sisters—still that is not everything. I would return late at night to find her in tears—at times she would reproach me with having drawn her into a life for which she was so ill-fitted. For a time our little Cecile seemed to console her for the dullness of our lives, the narrow limits of our income. But it returned—the craving for a life of gaiety, of change, of absorptions. The bébé, Cecile, was but a year old when I returned one afternoon from the hospital to find my wife, in the little room she used as a boudoir, drunk. I had suspected before, indeed, but it was the first time I had seen her thus. Myself, I nursed her through the sickness which confined her to her bed for days. She swore to me on a little crucifix she had from the Sisters that it would never be again. But a month later I returned after midnight, intensely fatigued, as it happened. I went to her bedroom. Shall I ever forget it? The room was desolated. Fragments of dresses, torn into strips, all the fine lingerie she had from her mother the day we were wedded, a portion of the little dowry she brought to me, were strewn in shreds upon the floor, and in the midst of it she lay, and as I looked on her and the wild disordered room, 'Thibault,' and he clasped his

hands in a tense, nervous grip. "I saw our little bébé, Cecile, standing, white-faced, round-eyed, at the rail of her cot—and she cried 'Maman! Maman!' looking at the thing that lay on the floor. I took the child, turned out the light and left my wife in the darkness. I could not lay hands on her, but the child still cried 'Maman!' so I returned, and in the darkness let her touch the face with her little hand—and she would have nestled to her even then, Thibauld, even then, such is the tie of blood. So we left her there in the darkness. It was best so—else the devil might have moved me and I had killed her. The child slept with me that night, and as she nestled in my arms—for the child was my heart, Thibauld, my heart—I heard her cry in her dreams, 'Maman! Maman!' That was the beginning of the end. I sent the child to my parents in the South. Again, with many tears, my wife swore upon the crucifix it would be the last time. Yet two days later I took her out of a cabaret, drunk. I locked her in her room. She escaped. She no longer swore on the crucifix, but became a tigress, and I put her in a madhouse. Then one day she returned to me, clean, sweet! Thibauld, it was like a breath from our lune de miel. I took her back, and for three weeks I thought life was renewed for us. To myself I swore I would forget the past. I had sent for the little one. She was to come to us at the close of the month. We had fixed it at a month.

A month we thought would augur well. You would say I was a fool, eh? But, Thibault, she was my wife, she was the little Cecile's mother, and I had loved her once! One evening I returned to dinner; there was a letter for me from my mother saying the child would be sent to us. My dear mother said much else to me in love and hope. I wept upstairs to my wife's apartment, my heart filled with the regeneration of our life, and I found her as before, as on the night I took the child away from her. That was the end, my friend. She left me. To the last I could not find it in me to thrust her into the streets. She saved me that much, for she left me and did not return. Years after, she wrote to me and later to our child, repeatedly, but we had left the home not long after her departure. They never reached me, those letters, till about two years ago. Cecile was then seventeen. Perhaps it was that she had in her childhood known no mother—I spoke of her as dead—she drew so close to me. We were one, Thibault, one in heart, one in soul—never did father and daughter grow more close to each other than we two. She supplied for me all that her mother might have been in my affection—for I am a man so made, it may be through my mother's blood in my veins, and the more so for the pain Eugénie had caused me. However, thus it was when a letter came from one Pasquier asking an interview on matters of personal concern to me.

It puzzled me at the time what such matters could be; but I was not long kept waiting. This unhappy woman, my wife, had fallen into the hands of the rascal Pasquier. He displayed the many letters my wife had written to me and to our child, and which had been returned. She had died in his apartments, and he had found them with her. Thus, at least, he said. I read one or two. They were letters which a stranger, reading, would justly think could not but move a man not wholly bloodless. The cry of the mother wrenched from her child, the prayer for forgiveness—the charge of many years of neglect and loneliness, of loveless years of early married life—all the implication in short of ruin at my door—this to Cecile!”

“Yes, yes, my friend—it is so with such women.”

“He offered to sell them to me, or failing that——”

“To put them in your daughter’s hands?”

“So! Well, I paid him a price. He held them letter by letter. With each one bought and burned I hoped the end had come. But, behold, another! and thus and thus, till in rage and despair I swore to end it. So I made an appointment for a night to buy them all at his price. I meant to kill him, Thibault, I was beside myself with the agony of this daily torture. Well, the night came, and look! when I entered the room I found another hand had done the work for me. Then I searched and found my wife’s letters and many others. The

villain had many names, Rossignol, Pasquier—*ma foi!*—he even masqueraded as a Marquis, the Marquis de Remusat; there were many English letters so addressed to him. I burned them all."

"Then you are truly innocent, my poor Bertrand?"

"Wait, *mon ami!* It was thus. The man had been strangled. Alone, he would have died—alone, I say—but when I found him there was still life beating dully in his heart."

"You could have saved him?"

"Was it for me to save him? Me! Had he not preyed on me, bit by bit? Had he not destroyed my life, till if I snatched an hour of sleep it was but to wake with a wrench at my heart—if the accursed letters should rob me of Cecile, my daughter, the creature who absorbed my being? For me to save him! Did Heaven demand that I should save him? I, his victim for month after month! Inexpressible! I to save him!"

"Truly it would be a demand beyond all nature! My comrade, you are indeed to be pitied! You are innocent, surely—how else could one regard it?—yet it is a duty—and yet—— Well, be it as it may, thou art my friend, Bertrand, and knowing what thou hast told me, I hold thee innocent."

"Thou!" and the wretched man laid his head upon his friend's arm, and rubbed his cheek against it as if some touch of divine pity came to him through the human contact.

The two men remained thus for some minutes, the one with compassion in his heart, the other with unspoken gratitude. It was Thibauld who broke the silence, that in this part of the prison was the silence of a tomb.

"What can I do for thee, unhappy one, what? Is it possible that the Administration would re-open your case?"

Bertrand shook his head despairingly. "What I have told you—you accept, because, Thibauld, you believe me. It is so, is it not? The neighbour in the house opposite swore he saw me kill the man. It is true I bent over him, opened his shirt, listened for the pulsation of his heart—it was true thus much—but I did not kill him as they say. What use then to re-open the case? What! Just to say once more 'It is not true. I did not kill him with my hands?'"

"Indeed, my friend," said Thibauld, gently, "I see but little hope in it. Still, it may be in my power to serve you in some other way. Think! Is there no service open to friendship? This confinement, these days of solitude——"

"If I could but sleep, Thibauld—sleep like the human cattle in the pens they kept us in, the long voyage—one might be happy. It is through sleep we escape from ourselves. It is good, my friend, to be a brute beast, for then one feels blows—only blows. But to think! Ah, it is this thinking! thinking till the brain throbs and the fancy be-

comes a fact, till the pain of it, Heaven! the pain of it makes one long to shriek, to beat the walls! Thibauld, I shall go mad! I cannot endure it! To myself I say 'Compose yourself—put it all away—think no more, be as the beasts, sleep, eat, drink, but think never.' Then I compose myself, I lie down on the plank, I say, 'No more—I shall think no more, I shall be master of myself'—thus I say continually. So for a minute, or it may be more—here one knows not—I master myself, I shut out everything and close my eyes. For a little while well, then it comes creeping back. I see Cecile in Paris, the few sous I left her gone. She is seeking work—she works far into the night, she rises with the day—she will be a good woman. She prays thus continually to be given work, to be a good woman. She is but a child—indeed but little more. She trusts in God and prays to Him unceasingly. But He has much to do, Thibauld, and forgets my little one. Her voice is lost in the prayer of humanity—the wailing of so many voices. So one day it comes to an end. What is the price of a good woman, eh?—and so—and so——" He rose suddenly and with a bitter cry threw himself face downward on the plank.

"Calm yourself, my friend! It is but imagination. Your daughter may be well cared for; there are friends of humanity, Bertrand. It is not all evil in this poor world. Ah! you have given me an inspiration." He crossed himself and reverent-

ly bent his head. "See, my comrade, the good God does not forget. He has spoken to me, Thibauld, thus: 'Seek out the child and save her.' Thus has He said!" and kneeling by the plank he put his arm around the body of the prostrate man. "I shall see to it. She shall be found, have no fear. I shall be to her a father in thy place till we bring thee back to freedom. So! have faith! Eh bien! mon ami! If the devil be not dead, neither is the good God. I take Cecile for Him and thee."

CHAPTER VIII

THE roadway was cut into the side of a mountain. On the one hand the bank rose abruptly to densely-wooded heights, on the other it sloped at a precipitous angle into a deep gully starred with the outspread crests of countless tree-ferns, here and there a timber tree forcing its head above the jungle of vegetation. From the branches of the latter were looped long scrub vines, their festoons of leaves and flowers hanging motionless in the moist and sultry atmosphere. The road-side was margined with flower-bearing shrubs; ground creepers swarmed over the rough stones and clothed them in foliage and blossom. The red scar of the road was mottled by broken lights, filtered through the overhanging trees—among them guavas, from whose branches depended luscious yellow fruit. Beyond the steep cutting the road widened out as the hills swept back. Here at one time a camp had been established, marked by the ruins of some huts and a grove of orange-trees, the fruit gleaming through the dark glossy leaves, or fallen in wanton profusion to rot among the grass and brambles. The bank below, almost hidden

beneath the rank growth of ferns and creepers, had once been terraced by the natives to grow their yams and taro.

The afternoon was well advanced, the valley below had lost the sunlight, and a faint mist rose from its moist decay. It caught the nostrils with the suggestion of malaria. On the hilltops above, the still-sunlit trees moved their listless leaves in the first breath of the evening breeze from off the sea. The road climbed upward out of the touch of valley mist and the long-drawn shadows of the trees till it reached the Mission house. A broad slant of sunlight caught the dark red-bricked wall of the building on the western side, and set it like a flame against the grove of cocoanut palms with their tall straight trunks and plumes of waving branches. The Mission house stood on a little eminence overlooking an unbroken mass of foliage to a crescent of yellow sand, and beyond it to an open space of sea. Between the horns of the crescent, and held in its sapphire cup, rode the little Mission schooner like a white sea-bird resting on outspread wings.

The Mission bell tolled its call to rest at the close of the day's work. The bank of low-lying clouds on the sea-line began to dress itself in rose and tender grey and lucent green. Soon the stone-capped hilltops mellowed into a harmony of colour against the deepening blue of the over-sky. Along the roadway, up from the mountain pass, came a

straggling procession of native children, homeward bound to the Mission house. They bore bushes and flowers in their hands. Scarlet blossoms of hibiscus, or bunches of wild berries were twined in their hair. Creepers with white petalled blossoms furnished garlands that gained an added contrast from the dusky skins. As the children marched, they sang a Mission hymn in a quaint intonation that seemed to have its fitting place in the time and scene.

From the Mission building came a man and a girl. With quick decisive steps they passed the little band of singers, who moved with indolent ease to the rhythm of their song.

"Later on, Cecile, I shall approach the Commandant that you may see him alone. But for the present it is against the rules. The rules of the prison are not easily broken. Still it is something that you should see his face again—it is something. He has been put on the roads but three weeks now. Even that is a favour the Commandant has granted me. We cannot have all at once, eh?"

"Is he much changed, M'sieur?"

"Peste! Cecile, do not 'M'sieur' me; am I not thy father, as it were? See now, what shall it be? Indeed, what shalt thou call me? Tiens! what say you to Olivier, eh? It is my name at baptism. Thus, I am Olivier to thee, as thou art Cecile to me. Changed, say you? Well, what would you, my child? Without doubt he is changed. Still, now

that he is in the full air again, once more can see the sky and trees, it will be well with him."

"How shall I recognize him, Olivier?"

"I have known the surveillant of the gang for some years, and did him service once in a sickness. With him I have arranged that your father shall stand out of the gang for a moment. It can be but a moment."

As he spoke, her young quick ear caught the sound of approaching feet on the road below.

"They are coming!"

He listened. "Indeed, I think it is so." Then, as in the increasing sound of tramping feet there came the sharp clink of metal, he nodded his head. "We must draw aside. Stand you behind this bush; between the branches you can see all." He himself stood by the roadway.

Tramp, tramp, clink, clink, came the heavy tread of weary feet, with the ring of metal against metal.

The hilltops were glowing blood-red with the down-going of the sun as the miserable *corvée* tramped through the dust of the road on the way home to prison. There were a dozen or more of them, young and old, clad alike in coarse brown blouses and pants—differing only in degrees of dirt and disarray. All wore the chain, sets of iron links depending from a thick leathern belt to the ankle and riveted there by an ankle-piece. As they walked they dragged the loaded leg. One bore a double chain. He lagged behind the rest and

sweat beaded his face. In addition to the surveillant with gun on shoulder, revolver strapped to his side, there were two Canaques armed with heavy clubs.

The surveillant saluted the Doctor as he saw him a few paces ahead standing by the roadway. As the gang filed past, casting evil glances at him, and muttering coarse comments, the surveillant called "Number 495, stand out! Come here!" He motioned to a Canaque to adjust the convict's belt. It sagged a little with the drag of the chain.

Number 495 stood like a patient ox.

"Face round! Quick!"

He turned, and the red glow of the sunset caught him full in the face. The Canaque gave the belt a rough tug, then signalled to his officer. It was secure.

Cecile in that brief interval looked into her father's face and the finger-nails of the hand which held the sheltering bush pressed into its soft bark.

This was her father, this! A face from which all hope was blanked, a face with dull, piteous eyes! A face foul and unclean, with stubbled beard, with lips set close to curb from utterance all the inward pain—this her father!

"Mother of God—oh! Mother of God!" she repeated to herself, with dry lips moving to inarticulate prayer.

"March!"

He turned and dragged his leg, his body slouched, his head bent.

"Father! father!" The words came in a quiver of exquisite pain.

Thibault made a movement as if to drown the cry.

Number 495 stood, and raised his head. He made a sound as of a dog who sniffs the air in recognition.

"Comment!" demanded the surveillant, who had heard the cry and apprehended whence it came.

Number 495 put out a shaking hand in supplication, "Pardon! Pardon! I thought——"

"Thought what?"

"It was a dream, M'sieur. Pardon! a dream!"

"A dream! How?"

"I dreamt—I thought—it was the trees, the wind, I know not what—my daughter's voice—Cecile! Cecile!"

"On! March!" and Number 495 marched with the gang.

They were gone. From her covert she watched them pass along the road and vanish round a turn.

Thibault drew her arm within his, and slowly they returned on the way to the Mission house. He had been true to his promise. Through friends in Paris he had traced her. They found her in one of the poorest quarters of the city, a street off the Boulevard Voltaire. She shared a room with two other girls, and together they made a meagre

livelihood at a factory for artificial flowers. The voyage had done something to restore health to her body, but her face with its pallor and the wistful look in its eyes bore traces of the trial through which she had come. She was not beautiful in any distinctive sense, perhaps her only claim to beauty lay in the luxuriant mass of black hair parted in the centre, drawn lightly back and held in a loose knot. Her skin had the tint of ivory that has been mellowed by time. The dark eyes and the sweet curve of the mouth held latent possibilities of character. As to the rest, she had the slight, petite figure of the national type.

On reaching the island, Thibault had placed her with the Sisters at the Mission house. In doing so he had no clearly mapped scheme before him. He knew that under the charge of the Sisters she would at least be removed from contact with the rough side of life in the convict community, and the education on which her father had expended so much care and individual tuition would not be lost. Without becoming a member of the religious community, she would participate in the life of the mission. Later on, thought Thibault, the father might, under the benignant influence of *la régénération*, find a place for himself in the colony. The scheme of *la régénération*, of converting convict into saint by the gift of a few hectares of land, a plough and some bushels of seed, was much in the air. The excellent Thibault, in the generosity of his heart

and the florescence of his imagination, pictured the reunion of father and child in a little Eden of coffee plants and sugar-cane.

On their way back to the Mission house they rested awhile by the road-side, where a mountain stream was caught in a stone trough, overflowed, and ran in a brook across their path.

Thibault did not intrude on the girl's thoughts till they reached this resting-place. The sun had gone down with tropic precipitancy, and already the stars were showing in the sky.

"Cecile, my little one, it will soon be time for me to return. I shall see the Commandant without delay, and use every effort to obtain for you an interview with your father. You must not despair, my child, because things move slowly. All things move slowly in the Administration—still they move. A few years seem an eternity to the young, but to us older ones, your father and myself, it is not so."

"But thus—Olivier! In such a life a year is eternity!"

"Your father will know of your arrival, and it will inspire him with hope."

"But the years—the years!"

"Think not of the years, my child, unless it be to remember that each one passed brings you nearer to his side. Already one has gone; in three—perhaps less—we may secure a concession for him. I

have a little influence. Such as it is, I shall use it to the utmost."

"Does Heaven make many friends such as you, Olivier?"

"There are many who do more than this little thing. But that is not what I have in mind to say to you, and"—glancing at the lights in the windows of the Mission house—"I must say it now. When I see your father it may be that he will say to me, 'Thibauld, this thing cannot be; my thought of the child was that she should be saved from Paris, not that she should be crucified here. What I lose her life for me? Spend the years waiting for the prison to give me back to her—me! Is it not enough that one life should be destroyed? What is a man, grown old, silent, morose, living in the past, to a young life such as hers?' What am I to say to him?"

"Olivier, my friend, do you not remember that in Paris it was the wish of your sisters that I should remain with them and find a home there? It was your wish also—but as to me, I had but one desire: to see him, to be near him, to wait for him till he should be free. He is innocent, but even if he were not—if he were truly as they say he is—still I would wait. Think you it is nothing to me that he is my father? What life could it be to me to have a lover, to marry, to have a home?—and wake at night and think, perhaps, the little one, the little life at my breast is mine—it loves me

beyond the world, it is me, Olivier, me myself, for it is my blood—and yet when I am sick and poor, and outcast, this child of mine will think of me not at all; he will laugh as I weep; he will feast as I starve; he will forget me, forsake me as I too forsook my father. Olivier—think of it waking at night with the little one pressed to me—and fear it would be thus!”

“There is a motherhood of God, truly. Is it not to such a Mother we look for pity and compassion? Indeed, Cecile, you say truly. It would come back to you in the night; it would come to you in the daytime also, when the little one smiled at you—he would not desert you in your pain, he would not leave you desolate and uncared for—so think you. Thus of a son—and of a daughter more truly; for in her heart she carries the motherhood of God.”

The girl looked up to the star-crusted sky. “If I deny thee, my father, may God deny me; if I desert thee, may God desert me, also!”

“It is well, Cecile. I shall answer him as you say. May the Mother of God plead for you!” and he bent and kissed her cheek in farewell.

CHAPTER IX

EARLY in the morning, for in this tropical island the day's work began with the rising of the sun, Paul Menaud tied his horse under the outspreading foliage of a poinciana that flanked the steps leading to the principal entrance to the Mission house. The Commandant, his father, to whom he acted as Secretary, had deputed to him among many other affairs of the prison administration a duty that was out of the ordinary routine, and came as a not unwelcome relief to its monotony.

The poppinée, clad in a loose bright-coloured robe, who led him to the reception-room, regarded the young officer with obvious admiration. To her unæsthetic and barbaric taste the smart but sombre-hued uniform with its epaulettes of silver, marking the rank of the wearer, was lacking in colour, but the tall, white-skinned "man-a-wee-wee," with his fine assumption of swagger, was as one who had descended from the God-land of the Sisters' teaching.

Paul waited patiently in the apartment with its bare walls and well-scoured floor, for the floors of the Mission house were kept as white as the souls

of the Sisters. Through the open door that led to the deep verandah he caught a glimpse of blood-red flamboyant trees, motionless in the hot sun, and beyond them, over the heads of waving palms and ragged-leaved bananas, past the fringe of sage-tinted niaouli, the blue curve of the sea. The air was filled with the rasping song of the locust. The thoughts of the Secretary turned wistfully to the hour of déjeuner, cooling drinks, and the pleasant siesta; but these things were, as yet, far off.

He rose as he heard the movement of a skirt—though the soft material gave but the mere suggestion of feminine proximity. Still it was a skirt—and a woman. The line of Paul's thoughts was abruptly broken. He was glad it was Sister Thérèse. Some of these other Sisters! Well, the Church had need of them doubtless. Certainly he, Paul Menaud, aged twenty-five years, had not yet come to that. He twirled his well-waxed moustache as he complacently contrasted his taste with that of the Church.

Sister Thérèse was demure, with little downcast eyes that sometimes flashed an upward glance, and in the flash suggested much that gave Paul food for meditation on the contemplative life.

It was this little flash of the eyes, this suggestion of possible mundane interests in the cribbed and cabined life of Sister Thérèse that brought the young man into sympathy with her.

"Ah! M'sieur Paul! what brings you here to-

day? Why, it is but a week since last you called!" She addressed him with a degree of familiarity, for he was a frequent visitor.

"Yes, Sister, it is but a week. Monsieur the Commandant, since I passed this way, gave me a little commission to do. There is a man in the prison in whom the Doctor Thibault—you know the ancient one?"

"The dear Doctor! Indeed I know him. An excellent man!"

"Well, it seems the Doctor has adopted this condemned's daughter as his ward—or the like."

"It is so. She is with us. The story is a sad one—as she tells it. Her father is innocent."

"My Sister, they are all innocent. Such a fold of white ones as we have!" and he shrugged his shoulders with the air of one who endures much folly of speech in patience.

"So! You are a cynic, M'sieur?"

"To be truly a cynic one must first be a saint, eh? What would you in such a place? Truly, the atmosphere is not one that encourages a fine faith in one's fellows. But about this girl. The Commandant desires to accommodate the wishes of the Doctor Thibault—if it may be done. The man is in the Fifth Class—and to the Fifth Class there is no privilege. Still, he would strain a point if the girl, or woman, might be trusted. Could I see her?"

"Cecile may be trusted absolutely. Do you know her history?"

"No!"

"Her father was a Doctor of Medicine—probably the fact accounts for Dr. Thibauld's interest in him. He educated Cecile with great care; she was an only child; the mother died and the father and daughter were thus more closely brought together."

"I see, she is the exception to the rule—of the old father Goriot."

"M'sieur is cruel. Honoré Balzac drew but one side of the picture. There is another."

"Will you permit me to see this devoted daughter?"

"Certainly." She left the room and presently returned with Cecile.

Paul bowed to her with a degree of courtesy that indicated the impression made on him by the graceful figure and refined face of the girl.

"The Commandant has charged me with a mission to you, Ma'm'selle. The Doctor Thibauld has interested himself in the case of your unfortunate father, and desires to obtain an interview for you. Possibly it may be arranged if Ma'm'selle is prepared to submit to the conditions."

"What are they, M'sieur?"

"Ma'm'selle must be prepared to submit—I regret it, but it is the Regulation—to be searched

before entering the cell. Also the interview must be in the presence of an officer of the prison."

"To be searched?"

Sister Thérèse interposed. "Surely M'sieur the Commandant will not insist on such an indignity to a woman?"

"It is not to be regarded in that light, Sister. The Regulation is not of the Commandant's making, but is binding on him. I shall arrange with the wife of the chief surveillant to treat Ma'm'selle with every consideration."

"I consent, M'sieur. It is but a little thing, after all—but may I not see my father alone? Surely that may be granted?"

"I am afraid not. It is the Regulation." Sister Thérèse gave an impatient shrug at the reiteration of "Regulation."

"Very well, if it must be so. When may I hope to see him?"

"It will be arranged, and you will be notified." He took up his hat as if to indicate that his mission was at an end.

"M'sieur, before you go I beg you to give me some information concerning my poor father. In cases such as his, when does the law permit him to leave the prison? The good Doctor has spoken of a possibility that some day we may be permitted to live together. There are concessions of land allowed to some of the prisoners. It is the hope of making a home with him some day that sustains

me. When may it be, M'sieur, a year hence, two, or more?"

"Much will depend upon his conduct in the prison, his work in the gang, and the reports of the surveillants. He may in time advance from class to class till such a concession as you speak of can be granted. But surely Ma'm'selle does not contemplate waiting such a period as that? It would be a sacrifice too complete, too cruel!"

"He is my father—and an innocent man."

"Your father will persuade you against it, be assured. Such a sacrifice as that would be inhuman."

"M'sieur does not realise what we are to one another."

He moved towards the door with a glance of admiration at the girl, as she stood in the open space of the simply-furnished room, her face irradiated with the enthusiasm of a personal sacrifice.

A week later she received a formal intimation from the Secretary to the Commandant that an interview with her father would be granted. Accompanying the official notification was a brief note, also, from the Secretary, couched in unofficial terms. If Mademoiselle would confer upon him such a pleasure, he would himself drive her on the following day from the Mission house to the prison. He explained that the absence of Dr. Thibault at Bourail prompted him to make this offer. Incidentally he omitted to state that the day for the

interview had been fixed by him in the full knowledge of the Doctor's absence.

Early the following morning they drove in Paul Menaud's buggy down the long red road that wound in and out among the hills on its way to Noumea. The air was as yet cool and fresh; the tangle of creepers along the road-side, the blue *duranta*, yellow *buddlea*, many-tinted *crotons*, and the almost impenetrable thickets of *lantana* were still wet with night dew. The spirit of youth possessed them; the passing fragrance of the bush flora, the tropical wealth of its colour, the sensuous intoxication of the scene made their impress on them. Before the shimmer of the sun on the iron roofs of the little capital caught their eyes and denoted the approaching end of their journey, Paul had established himself on a plane of familiarity with his companion that in so brief a period would have been impossible in the conventional atmosphere of the older world. A sleepless night spent in feverish contemplation of the approaching interview had given a touch of colour to Cecile's pale face, and induced in her a state of mental exaltation that was impatient of formal constraint. She afterwards reflected, not without apprehension, on the unrestrained confidence she had given her companion, the almost childish faith with which she had poured out her thoughts to him.

And Paul Menaud, his charge handed over to the wife of the chief surveillant, threw the reins

to a Canaque and turned into his official bureau, congratulating himself that he had laid a good foundation for such an affair as had crossed his mind when he first met her in the Sisters' reception-room.

CHAPTER X

REMEMBER that every hour's delay may mean the slaughter of a helpless family. It is a great trust to repose in the hands of so young a man. See to it that you spare no exertion. You leave at once. Your father assures me that you are well acquainted with the country. Is that so?"

"The Commandant, my father, has told you truly. Before my visit to France I traversed it from end to end—and a year's absence has not dimmed my memory."

"It is unfortunate that this outbreak should occur at such a time. We can spare you no men. You must depend solely on the loyalty of the tribes of Canala. Are they to be trusted?"

"It is so long, your Excellency, since we had trouble with the natives that I speak with diffidence of the loyalty of one where all seemed loyal. Still I know the Chief Nondo, and feel confident we can win him to our side by gifts, if the memory of the old feud between his tribes and those of Atai is not in itself sufficient."

"So I understand. There was open warfare between Nondo and Atai in old days."

"Yes, and in their fathers' time. The old men still speak of it. I am sadly mistaken if we cannot fan this smouldering fire into a flame. I might explain, your Excellency, that in these internecine feuds lies our safety. With Nondo we must trust not to his loyalty to France, but to his hatred of Atai."

"The news we have is that ten settlers' homes have been burnt out at Fonwari. Eighteen men, women and children were butchered—some free settlers, others concessionaires of the prison. Some of the concessions were but recently granted. The men can scarcely have had time to fully establish themselves on the land. Still, free or convict, they are lives. You must spare no effort to save them."

"Your Excellency may rely on it—no effort shall be spared by me."

"Now away, Captain, and success be with you!"

Captain Paul Menaud left Government House with the sense of elation that lifts the head of youth into the region of the gods. But a week ago he had returned from France after a year's furlough with the commission of a Captain, and now by the claim of his father's friendship with the Governor had been entrusted with a mission that many an older soldier might have envied.

For years the French had been at peace with the tribes. Then, as the memory of past insurrec-

tions against the foreign rule was becoming matter of history, came this sudden outburst. The garrison of the penal island, recruited from the least favourable elements of the soldiery of France, had never been very strong, either in numbers or efficiency. At the present time, after a long period of tranquillity among the native tribes, it had become barely sufficient to meet the requirements of the convict establishment. Fortunately, as Menaud had indicated, the insurrectionary movement was local, but a movement local in its inception, might, if not speedily checked, lead to the sinking of tribal differences in a united revolt against the white conquest.

"My son," said the Commandant, as they parted, "you take your life in your hands. That rascal, Nondo, is not to be trusted. We have fallen into a false security. Heaven knows what this may not lead to! Remember, then, how much depends on you, and remember, also, my son, that you give your life to the service of France—far out here in this distant island, with little glory, it may be, but still for France."

"I shall not forget." They embraced and parted.

At Canala, Captain Menaud called together the chiefs who bore allegiance to Nondo as their king. The assembly was conducted with all the customary ceremony. To have omitted ceremonial would, he argued, have evidenced weakness, perhaps have

roused animosity. To each chief he rendered his meed of honours. Curbing the fever of impatience that would have urged him to precipitate action, he addressed the assembled chiefs in measured tones. The tribes under Atai had surprised and murdered a group of settlers at Fonwari. The men of Atai were traitors and the Government had declared war on them. The Governor had spoken thus: "Go to the men of Canala and say I, who am the Great Chief of this land, beside whom Atai is but a child, look to you men of Canala to avenge the death of my people. Remember what your fathers have told you of the men of Atai; how they destroyed your homes, laid waste your taro fields, and spared neither woman nor child. Remember also how your fathers beat them into subjection and held them slaves. Shall the men of Atai redden the sky at night with fire from my people's homes, and the men of Canala stand by like women whimpering in the dark, their teeth chattering with fear? When you return with the heads of Atai and his men I will reward you richly. If you stir not, but lie sick with fear at the sound of Atai's conch, then shall I look away from you and say, 'These men of Canala are but fit to plant yams and taro for the men of Atai, whom their fathers treated as women.' He has sent me to you," continued Paul, "standing thus, without one soldier, so that to you alone should be the honour of bringing Atai into subjection. Chiefs of Canala, what

say you? Does the shaking of Atai's spear make your arms weak as the arms of children? Does the sight of his hatchet set you weeping?"

The chiefs moved restlessly. "If Nondo were here he would answer!" they exclaimed. "He is King and at Foa. We cannot speak without Nondo."

"Then shall we go to Nondo! Go, tell the tribes to assemble to-night at Ciu!" and with an abrupt gesture, he closed the assembly.

Late in the afternoon of the same day a messenger returned to Paul Menaud's temporary camp with news that the tribes, or such of them as had been reached, would assemble at Ciu by sundown. The Captain at once set out for the place of rendezvous. He was mounted on a young mare, who resented the curb placed on her pace, for her rider desired to avoid any appearance of undue haste. He went to meet them as their master, not at their call. It was well that they should wait his time. The sun was setting as he drew near to Ciu. As they saw him in the fading light reach the crest of an elevation on the track the chiefs went forward to greet him. They explained that it took time to assemble the tribes, and that a full muster could not be made till they reached Coinde. The force so far mustered fewer than fifty men. He determined to go on that night to the grand rendezvous, taking a cross track that would save some miles. They marched in silence, the chiefs taci-

turn and preoccupied, the Captain smoking cigar after cigar, the mare restless and fearful at every rustle in the dense bush through which the narrow pathway wound. It was daybreak when they reached Coinde. Here the Captain found between 400 and 500 Canaques gathered in war array, with hatchet, spear or waddy in hand, their chests and faces smeared with ashes. He noted an underlying excitement among the tribes. It was not manifested in any overt form, such as cries or excess of movement, but by a restless, though orderly, coming and going. The chiefs who had accompanied him now mingled with their assembled warriors to return re-enforced by other subsidiary chiefs.

They approached Menaud, and represented to him that before any further advance could be made they must consult Tearick, the war-stone, which was interred at Coinde in a sacred place known only to the King Nondo and the chief sorcerer. Until this oracle had been consulted it was hopeless to think of any meeting with the King himself. If the oracle were unpropitious, Nondo would not dare to declare war even against his hereditary enemy.

Menaud, inwardly cursing all this folly, made no outward manifestation of impatience, but demanded to see the sorcerer himself. At this there was some demur, but at length, since he persisted with an increase of vehemence that had its effect, the sorcerer

was brought to him. He, too, was smeared with ashes from head to foot, and bore in one hand a yam, in the other a gourd. Dismounting, Menaud drew the man aside.

"If Tearick speaks 'no war,' neither you nor your women nor your children shall see another yam"—the years are marked by the season of the yam and taro—"for the Great Chief of my people will come with many soldiers and slay you, every one; but if Tearick speaks 'war,' then shall I send red cloth and rum and knives and many good things to you and the King. Let Tearick speak."

The sorcerer and the chiefs went apart. The moment was a critical one. Here was a French officer in their midst, unarmed, except as to the rifle slung across his back, unattended by even a servant. He was wholly at their mercy, and deep in the thoughts of the chiefs were memories of villages set in flames, of brothers, sisters, old men and women thrust into the furnace of their burning homes. There was no love lost between the masters and the conquered tribes living on sufferance. Had Menaud come to them with a body-guard of armed men, a present menace to their lives, it is possible that the verdict would have been against him; but there was something in the unconventionality of the appeal that touched their pride. The audacity of it was in itself an appeal; the assumption of a complete trust disarmed them. They knew, as Menaud knew, that above and beyond

all internecine warfare was the common bond of revolt against the cursed "man-a-wee-wee," who had driven them out of the fertile valleys into the barren wastes of niaouli-covered land, where scarce a pouaca—a lizard—could live. Were they to become as the men of Balade, eaters of the earth—payote? They tossed about between them the odds and chances of success in a revolt. The voice of the sorcerer interposed. Had they not revolted before, and what had come of it but the slaughter of whole tribes? If they killed many white men, would not more and more come across the water, till the tribes were swept into the sea? Let him go and consult Tearick without more ado.

Then the sorcerer went through the camp, in and out among the warriors, who sat cross-legged or resting their bodies on their heels, the weight thrown on toes dug into the soil. Reaching the outskirts of open land, he plunged into the dense growth of encircling scrub, twisting his way in and through the matted vines and thickly-studded timber till he reached the foot of a tree. Here lay the sacred stone. Cutting the yam he bore with him in two, he ate half and threw the remaining portion on the ground, an offering to the dead. Then scraping away the soil, he disclosed the sacred stone, rudely carved with the figure of a bird. Wrapping it in his tilit he converted it into a pillow and lay down to sleep. In his brief rest he had a vision. Tearick spoke to him. He replaced the

stone and carefully concealed the traces of disturbance in the earth. Then, by a circuitous route, he returned to the camp.

A murmur of expectancy ran through the crowd, like the rustling of wind through trees. "Tearick had spoken!"

Going directly to the group of tribal chiefs, he squatted in their midst.

"Well?"

"Tearick has spoken!" With dramatic instinct he paused to add effect to the dénouement.

"What says the sacred stone?"

"The men of Atai shall hide themselves behind the poppinées, for their hearts are the hearts of children before the warriors of Nondo. 'Let there be war!' says Tearick."

Meantime, the Captain Menaud smoked and waited. He had the virtue of the savages themselves—the virtue of patience. But underneath the outward calm, imagination pictured to him the desperate plight of the unhappy settlers, perhaps even then in torture, whilst he stood idly by, waiting the verdict of Tearick—an unholy piece of mummery.

"Tearick has spoken! It is war!" said the spokesman of the chiefs.

"It is well! Tearick is wise! Let us set out!"

Then rose a great commotion as the warriors, with wild cries and the sounding of conch shells, held aloft their spears and hatchets. "Din Din!

Akatika !" The war-cry was caught up by five hundred throats. The chiefs, with the Captain in their midst, the warriors following in an irregular train, with little semblance of discipline, moved on the track.

CHAPTER XI

THE road to Foa lay through precipitous mountain country across the central range. Passing through a belt of dreary niaouli, they commenced the ascent to the crag-topped mountains.

The base of the hills lay in dense obscurity; above the moonlight gleamed on the bare rocks with metallic lustre. As hour after hour went by, the attenuated line of men twining in and out through the dense bush moved in almost absolute silence. Their course could be traced by the numerous points of light made by flaming torches lit to scare away the devils of darkness, whom the Canaques regard with the fear of children. The presence of the white man did something to assure them, for against him and his race the devil-devil could not work his evil charms.

They crossed a shallow torrent and wound round the contour of the mountain itself; below, the land shelved precipitously into a valley where the mountain-streams and springs fed a river that flowed rapidly to the sea; above, the acclivity rose sheer to the mountain crest. The Captain dismounted and led his mare along the narrow bridle-

path. The barren ridge of the mountains reached, he called a halt. They were now in full moonlight and the torches were quenched. The halt was brief, and soon they moved along the ridge, the dotted line of warriors fretting the cloudless skyline. Dawn broke, and they looked down upon a scene of marvellous beauty. They were isolated above the clouds. The cup-like valleys on either side were filled with silver mist, from the body of which long, ghost-like fingers crept up the rugged mountain-sides and dissipated before the beams of the sun. As the warriors began to descend, they passed into the mist, the dripping foliage catching on the surface of its leaves the sparkles of morning light. As the sun rose higher it cut rifts in the fleecy clouds, till here and there the Captain caught glimpses of the fertile valley below; Foa and Fonimolo, the cultivated plains of Fonwari, and, for one brief moment, the blue of the sea beyond.

At the chiefs' request, he again called a halt. They explained to him that they were nearing the King's village, and some of their number were deputed to go forward to his Casque and give him notice of Menaud's coming. Patiently the warriors squatted on their haunches and soon sank into a half sleep, wearied with the long night march.

The Captain dismounted and stretched his cramped limbs by walking to and fro upon the little plateau where they had halted.

An hour later the deputation returned, and he

remounted to be taken to an audience with the King. A mile beyond, they reached the foot of the range, and in a grove of cocoanut palms came upon the village. The King's Casque was a conical house, built of saplings and the supple branches of scrub vines, interwoven to make a lattice, and thatched with sun-dried grass. Near the entrance, a narrow opening left in the side of the building, stood a great flamboyant tree, its brilliant flowers red as flame against the neutral-tinted thatch.

Beneath it, on a mat and in the midst of his wives, sat the King, a man of large frame, the top of his head shaved—a barbaric suggestion of the ecclesiastical tonsure—his ears pierced with holes and pendent with the weight of shell ornaments, on his arm an amulet made from the tusk of a wild boar.

The Captain approached him on foot, holding in his hands the rifle he had carried across his back.

“ ‘ Give this,’ said the Governor, ‘to our friend and ally the great Chief Nondo as a sign to bind us. Take neither soldiers nor arms, but go to the King as from a chief to a chief, as from brother to brother. If we fight together it is his and much more also, gifts such as a great chief gives to a great chief.’ ”

Menaud placed the rifle in the King's hands, then pulled open his regimental jacket as a sign that he came unarmed.

“It may be in the King's mind to kill me and

break his bond with the Governor. Let him make war on a man unarmed if the thought of Atai's warriors turn his blood to water. The Governor would have Nondo as his friend, if not then let it be war between us; and the tribes of Canala, to the child at its mother's breast, shall burn in the fire of their homes. Not one shall be spared; they shall be destroyed utterly, they and Atai's men. So says the great white chief. Tearick the wise has said 'Let the King make war against Atai.' Is it so?"

The King took the proffered rifle and handled it with the joy of a child over a new toy. Firearms were forbidden among the tribes. Such a gift was a mark of right royal favour—and Tearick also had spoken.

The Captain, as he ended his brief but emphatic speech, held out his hand as a sign of friendship. The King, accustomed by contact with the whites to their national pledge of good-will, rose and held it in his own.

"My brother the Governor and I are as one chief, our people are as one people. Tearick has said 'War.' It is war!" He made a motion to one of the tribal chiefs who entered the Casque and brought out a conch shell.

The warriors, resting on the plateau above the village, sprang to their feet as the war conch sounded in their ears.

CHAPTER XII

THE night had closed in on a day of terror. Of the thirty or more homes grouped in the fertile valley traversed by the river not half remained unscathed. Smoke rose in the quiet evening air, shut in by sheltering hills, from a score of still smouldering piles. They marked the sites of huts, some of logs, others of bark that had been built by the hands of the free settlers and concessionaires. To each home had been assigned a grant of land. The rudely-built huts of the concessionaires were grouped apart. The broad verandahs in which the settlers and their families ate their meals had been made beautiful with the latticing of wild creepers. The ground, cleared of heavy timber and tangled scrub, had been planted with coffee on the sloping uplands, with arrow-root and manioc on the flats. There were traces of terraced land on the hill-sides where once the natives had grown their yams and taro.

On the verandah of one of the still remaining homes a woman, girl-like in figure, rough-clad and toil-weary, sat on a rude bench gazing listlessly on the scene of devastation. She was so overcome

by weariness that even the fear which had filled her heart all day gave way before it, till only a dull animal longing for rest remained.

Of all the concessions the one held by Cecile and her father was the barest, the least cultivated. It was only six months since they had, by the exceptional clemency of the Governor, been settled on their grant of eight acres of land. Seldom indeed had a convict sentenced for life received such speedy consideration. It was due to the good Doctor Thibauld, who had left no stone unturned to repay his debt of gratitude to the condemned man. Had he lacked the stimulus of his own sense of indebtedness, it would have been supplied by his appreciation of the daughter's devotion to her parent. The Government had furnished them with tools and grain, and out of the Doctor's own limited means had been advanced a little capital to set them in the way of a fair start. But behind all the offices of the Doctor in their favour, Cecile was conscious of the influence of Paul Menaud with his father the Commandant. In many a way which he took good care should come to her knowledge he had lightened the heavy burden of the convict's lot. He had found means to have him transferred from the road gang to the ateliers, where he was taught the elements of carpentering—a knowledge that now stood No. 495 on the roll in good stead. Quietly but persistently Paul Menaud had pushed his suit, that affair on which

he had set his heart since he had met the girl at the Mission house. At first, innocent of heart and guileless as the crested cagou of the crimsonbeak hiding in the thickets of the bush, she attributed to him no evil thought, no deliberate design. His interest was to her but the interest which a good man takes in ameliorating the lot of a fellow-creature.

Her trust had a rude awakening. Some fifteen months before, he had met her unexpectedly on the roadway some distance from the Mission house. She was returning from a visit to a settler's home where she had been sent with food from the Mission kitchen to a wife recovering from an illness. He was riding in the opposite direction, but meeting her, dismounted and throwing the bridle across his arm, turned on his track and accompanied her homeward. The delicate beauty of the girl had ripened in the healthful surroundings of the Mission house. Her pale face had warmed under the sunlight to a richer tone. The trace of listlessness in her movements had been replaced by the vigour of complete health. She walked with the easy grace of one to whom life in the open air was a customary environment. From immature girlhood she had developed into early womanhood. Paul Menaud had not seen her for some time, and this day the change wrought in her by the new life came to him with a sense of transformation.

"Cecile!"

They had been chatting discursively, and with an indefinite premonition of danger, she had kept the conversation going briskly as if in so doing lay some degree of security which to-day, for the first time, she doubted.

"Cecile! I—I have something to say to you."

"Yes?"

"Come, sit down." They had reached the stone trough by the wayside, where the mountain stream was caught and overflowed. It was here she and Doctor Thibauld had rested after the road-gang had gone clanking on their way to prison. She hesitated with a touch of alarm.

"Not now, Monsieur: I am already late. In a little while the Mission bell will ring for vespers. Let us walk on—unless indeed you would return. The Sisters——"

"The Sisters can wait, Cecile—I cannot. My little Cecile—you were but a girl when first I saw you, so it seemed; but to-day you—you are a woman, Cecile."

"Monsieur, I pray you let me go. Indeed, indeed I cannot stay."

"'Cannot' to me? Think, *chérie*, what I have been to thee and—thy father."

"Thank you a thousand times, Monsieur. If prayers will bring you reward——"

Then Paul Menaud caught her by the arm and looking into the innocent face, laughed, with

a strain of irony in the laugh that caught at her heart, and sent the blood paling from her face.

"Thy prayers, Cecile! Mon Dieu! Thy prayers!" He threw the bridle on the forked branch of a tree and put his arm around her to draw the shrinking figure to him.

Clank! Clank! Round the turn of the road with shuffling feet and dragging chain came the road-gang, sweating and dust-grimed.

He drew her roughly into the shelter of the bordering foliage, but with the lissom twist of a wild creature that avoids the closing snare she escaped him, and ran along the road ahead of the slowly-moving gang.

Then Paul Menaud bit his lip, and white with chagrin turned to his horse. With set face he acknowledged the formal salute of the Surveillant as the gang passed him with ill-concealed and malicious cognisance in their eyes.

After that encounter a great fear entered her heart, and each day brought with it the dread of a possible meeting with Menaud. She had as yet too little knowledge of the world to conceive it possible that any human should set a price, the price of a daughter's sacrifice, on the mitigation of her father's pain. The fear was the intuition of sex rather than the reasoned conclusion of worldly wisdom. It was with intense relief that she heard one morning from Sister Thérèse, who had the

news from a gossip in Noumea, that Paul Menaud was about to go on a year's furlough to France.

The day he sailed she made excuse for absence from her round of daily duty, and later, Sister Thérèse seeking her, found her in the little chapel on her knees before the altar of the Mother of Pain.

When she rose the Sister in womanly sympathy asked her if any special sin or sorrow had beset her.

"It was not prayer but thanks I offered, Sister. Surely the Mother of God has interceded for me! She too is a woman."

"Aye, truly!" answered the Sister with an odd intonation in her voice, half of surprise, half of innate sympathy. There was much one could confess to the Mother of God who shared our common humanity.

It was at this time that Doctor Thibault received a succession of impassioned entreaties from Cecile, urging him to secure a concession for her father. The Doctor, who strained his influence to the utmost in securing privileges to the condemned man that had already earned for him the covert enmity of his fellow-prisoners, could not restrain some feeling of impatience at the urgency of her appeals.

Fortune, however, at the time played into his hands. A new Governor took office who was not only intimately acquainted with some members of the Doctor's own family, but came charged with

a new policy of *régénération*. The Doctor reflected that with the advent of each new administrator came an enthusiast, and with the departure of each returned a tired-out cynic.

His Excellency visited the prisons. The convicts in clean brown blouses, and holding their straw hats in hand so that the full light fell on their cropped heads and freshly shaven faces, were drawn up in a square facing inwards. His Excellency was new to the business. He overflowed with the political milk of *régénération*. He would light these dull inanimate faces, brute-like in their passivity, into the enthusiasm of a new hope. So his Excellency addressed them as men and brothers, exiles over whom France mourned as a mother over errant children, whom she punished but to bring to reason, to purify, to ennoble, to make worthy sons of a gallant nation. He gesticulated, he appealed to Heaven, and then after an impassioned peroration looked for the awakened soul in the wizened, the cunning, the sodden, or despairing faces grouped around him. And as he looked all the enthusiasm flickered out of the soul of the man as a candle-glimmer flickers out in the foul air of a mine. Time and again he persevered, and time and again he suffered the same inconsequent conclusion.

Doctor Thibault was familiar with this brand of man. They had received many samples of him in the island, and he knew the almost inevitable end of his course. He would return later on, shipped

back like a consignment of flat champagne, all the sparkle of enthusiasm gone, only the dregs of life left to him. He would be worn-out between the political warfare of the free settler and the convict, disheartened in his Utopian attempt to grow figs of thorns, grapes of thistles. It was well, the Doctor argued out of his experience, to take this man when he was new, before the system had him in its grasp. He therefore made haste to lay Bertrand's case before his Excellency, and without great pressure secured for his friend the grant of a concession in the valley of Foa.

The mere sense of a return to liberty did much to restore Bertrand to manhood. His liberty within territorial confines was little restricted. He was subject to a degree of surveillance, but it was formal rather than real. On his strip of eight acres he built a rude home for himself and Cecile. Then the libéré set himself to the task of clearing and cultivating the land. He knew practically nothing of either. Hope was high in his heart when he first faced the work. After the day's rude unskilled hacking and tearing in the scrub he returned to the hut, and shared with Cecile a meal of rice, haricot beans, salt beef and now and then a little fresh meat. These with coffee and bread were its staple articles. Cecile had learned the elements of cooking in the kitchen of the Mission house, but she had not the training of the peasant's wife or daughter either in economy or culinary skill.

The concessionaires about them were men of the lowest type, hopelessly ignorant of farming, lazy, filthy in their habits, often vilely immoral. Soon to the burden of his physical toil the father added the weight of a great mental unrest. What of Cecile's future in the daily surroundings of such a life? With the instinct of repulsion from the degrading conditions surrounding them, they drew apart from their fellow-libérés. The effect of this exclusiveness was a speedy retaliation. It manifested itself in a hundred little ways, and intensified as time went on. The patch of cultivation Bertrand after infinite toil succeeded in establishing was ruthlessly devastated in a night by unknown hands. One day whilst labouring in the scrub he turned to find Cecile, pale-faced and panting, at his side. She had run from the hut, and now threw herself on the ground at his feet exhausted with fear and effort. Whilst she had been cooking their food a drunken concessionaire entered the hut and menaced her. Thenceforward she accompanied her father to his work, and returning at night they cooked their food together. One night they came home to find the place pillaged. But a few days before on a neighbouring concession the wife of a libéré, a woman he had married out of the women's prison at Bourail, had quarrelled with her child, of two years old; the little one, tempted by hunger, had pilfered food. She dragged the child into a neighbouring wood and returned alone. Some libérés

confessed subsequently that they had heard the little one's frantic cries, but took no heed. It was no affair of theirs—much was done in this place, and it was not good to interfere in another's business. The father found the child's murdered body, and sought the mother. She had fled and could not be found. Possibly she had crept back for food, and stolen the little store in Bertrand's hut. The thought of such a presence in their vicinity chilled Cecile to the bone with fear. Weary, hungry, and in mortal terror, she stole to her father's side and would not leave him. He lit the fat-lamp in the hut, and tried by reading a book aloud in measured tones to restore her to tranquillity; but neither this nor the attempt he made to draw her thoughts away from the present by recalling the happy days in their home at Passy, brought rest to the overwrought girl. She refused to leave him, and it was only after long remonstrance and persuasion that she consented to lie down dressed upon her bed whilst her father sat by the bedside, his daughter's hand in his. At last she fell asleep. Not so with the unhappy man, who sat the black hours through till the dawn showed through the chinks and crannies of the primitive home. Would God they could die thus together and be at peace! His heart was full of bitterness towards his Maker and his fellow-men. Why should they be visited with all this pain? Had Heaven no mercy that not only he but this innocent creature, so loyal, so pure of heart,

should be tortured thus? The murdered child was perhaps little to be pitied. She may have escaped much by death. Death was better than this daily hell. He must end it. He was surely less than a man that he should keep her here at his side. He would write to Thibauld and beseech him to take her away. If she refused to go he would compel her—if his entreaties failed then, in mercy, he would force her from him, even with rough words and the denial of his love. He would destroy even their love, the intense blood-rooted love he bore this one child given to him, the baby he had nestled in his arms, the child whose life was interwoven with his own. He would kill even that to save her. She had drawn his rough hand, cracked and scarred, to her pillow and rested her face on it. Bertrand, as the dawn sent its long grey pencils of light through the cracks, fell on his knees by the bedside and fought out his agony in silence, his face buried in her dress stained with the marks of their never-ending toil. This, his little Cecile, this rough-clad, work-worn girl whose limbs quivered with the shock of nerves strained beyond control.

It was thus with them when news came of the revolt among the native tribes. A messenger had been despatched from Fonwari to warn the settlers at Focola and Foa of the advance. Behind him he left the smoke from burning homes rising in blue spirals to the sky. At Focola, a few kilomètres distant, the settlers had been assembled and the availa-

ble stock of muskets and ammunition distributed. The women and children were sent on under an escort of a few lads to Foa. There nothing could be done but to make preparation for a final resistance till help came across the mountains. The messenger, re-enforced by two others, was sent on in hot haste to carry the news to the nearest telegraph station. Communciation by wire was confined to a comparatively short distance from the capital, and news of the outbreak did not reach the central authorities till some days after Atai's men had descended upon Fonwari.

The officer in charge of the district directed that all men free or on ticket-of-leave should assemble to receive instructions. When they came in he addressed them briefly. It was a question of their homes and their lives. All thoughts of rank or place, all internal differences must be sunk to meet this common danger. Arms and ammunition so far as they went would be distributed to free and convict alike. As to the latter, let them beware of any deed of treachery. No punishment could be too great for such an act at such a time.

That day no work was done in the fields. Supplies of food were handed to the women, and a rough camp constructed where they could cook and distribute the soup, meat and coffee.

At mid-day the women and children from Focola and Fonwari arrived, and were billeted in the

homes that could accommodate them. They also were pressed into the general service.

At night-fall a messenger arrived stating that the natives had reached Focola. It was rumoured that a great feast—a pilou-pilou—would be held that night, so that till the following day the defenders of Foa need not anticipate attack. After sundown they saw the distant glow of fires. A few scouts were sent up the river to observe the movements of the enemy, and bring back early intelligence of any advance. Bertrand, as one of the most intelligent of the little force under his command, was instructed by the officer in charge to make one of the number.

Silently for some kilomètres, hidden in the obscurity of the matted foliage, they followed the main track by the river, then made a détour till they came within sight of lights glimmering among the trees. Here they halted. It was determined to separate, a subsequent meeting-place being fixed.

Bertrand set out in the direction assigned to him. The twinkling lights became more clearly defined as he forced a way through the scrub. At last he stood on the confines of a clearing, and from his place of concealment looked on the feast of the dead.

A rude hut had been constructed in the centre of the clearing, and in it had been placed the bodies of the slain. Through the interstices of the rough-

ly-thatched roof rose a dense cloud of smoke from the smouldering fire within.

Conch shells were sounded, and the sorcerers advanced dancing with extravagant gestures. On their heads were fastened masks closely woven from the stems of wild creepers, and rudely painted into a grotesque semblance of a face. So large were some of these that they had to be supported by both hands. To Bertrand the fantastic figures passing in and out of the glare of torches suggested a barbaric Walpurgis night. Again the conchs sounded and a troop of men, streaked from head to foot with war paint, rushed in and riddled the hut with spears and arrows. As they retired, a low monotonous chant rose from every side, and the chief sorcerer Takata came from the darkness of the wood into the flickering light of the torches. He bore the war mask, Apoumea, a construction of wicker and cocoa-fibre. The eyes were closed, but the mouth moved with the suggestion of life. It was capped by a tangle of human hair whose locks fell on the sorcerer's shoulders. After him came a troupe of dancers bearing packets of straw and cloth, enclosing gifts to the dead. They carried branches of palms in their hands, and squatted before the hut in triple rank. The sorcerers sprinkled them with damp ashes as a symbol of the slowly-burning dead and of the tears of their mourning wives and children. A warrior took a cocoa-nut and pierced it to indicate destruction. The "chant of the dead"

rising and falling was the only sound that broke the silence of the ritual. Suddenly at a blast from the conch shells, the singers sprang to their feet, and with cries and whistles broke into a wild unrestrained dance. As if seized by a frenzy, the surrounding warriors, brandishing spears and waddies, rushed in and joined the dancers till the scene became a riot of tossing flames and intermingled limbs—a carnival of hell.

Bertrand felt his scalp tighten and his eyes expand as he gazed on the scene. It lasted, so it seemed to him, for at least an hour. Then one by one the dancers fell exhausted to the ground. The dance was followed by the pilou-pilou, a feast of yams and spoil raped from the desolated homes of the settlers. With the first faint indications of dawn he turned to retreat, and as he did so the smouldering fire in the hut leapt into flame, and consuming the flimsy structure exposed the piled-up bodies of the dead.

CHAPTER XIII

THE day was well advanced when the little body of scouts returned to the settlement. It was improbable that an attack would be made that day.

After the feast Atai's men would doubtless rest a day, then move forward in the dawn of the following morning.

The day was occupied with preparations for a siege. Quantities of food were collected, and all the available supplies of fruit—bananas, guavas, oranges—were stripped from the trees. A rude stockade or fort was constructed with boxes, bags filled with earth and sand, and with the more portable sections of fallen timber. Behind this shelter were placed the women and children. The older men were told off to defend the stockade in the event of the main body of the little garrison being driven back. All the younger men were to be advanced in the form of a rude semi-circle. It would extend to cover the bulk of the concessions, a few of the outlying homes being stripped of effects and left to their fate.

It was a day of heavy labour, but labour which needed no incentive to its performance. Grim

stories circulated from mouth to mouth of the atrocities that had marked previous revolts—of torture and cannibalism. A glimpse at the hastily-constructed fort on the elevation back from the river, where the women and children were huddled together, sufficed to give renewed vigour to tired arms.

Knit together by a common purpose, inspired by a common fear, free and convict worked side by side. The impending crisis in their fortunes and their lives had a force in it more potent than that of any scheme of *régénération*. When face to face with death, the gift of life became precious even to the most wretched of the many *misérables* gathered together in this little valley of crime.

That night they lit a camp fire in the vicinity of the stockade and lay around it. None returned to their homes. With sunrise the women were set to work making coffee and preparing food.

As on the previous night, scouts had been sent out to bring word of any advance. They came in early.

Atai's men were on the move.

The officer in charge of the district, who had assumed command, a young athletic man with a swarthy southern face and the patois of a Gascon, mounted a coigne of the rectangular fort and addressed his men. He briefly detailed to them their duties. Those who possessed muskets and rifles were to be thrown out as *francs-tireurs*; those

whose weapons were axes, field forks, and scythes were to be massed in small companies at the more exposed homes; the older men, armed in like rude fashion, were to guard the stockade.

Petty officers of the establishment were put in command of the several divisions. The men then went to their assigned posts, some with bravado and profanity, others with quiet stoicism.

At 11 o'clock or thereabout two libérés came hot-footed along the river track. They had been sent up the river to bring the alarm.

"They are coming!" All eyes were turned in the direction of the convicts. At first nothing could be discerned, until as the eye dwelt longer on the scrub belting the river bank, it seemed to move as if agitated by an under current of air.

Atai's men came on in native fashion, each man bearing a bush that partially concealed him—a suggestion of the moving of Birnam Wood to Dunsinane.

As the libérés reached the extended line of armed settlers, a number of warriors raced along the track—the advance guard of the main body.

Ping! A rifle shot sings through the air, and there is a momentary check to the racing men. On again they come as yet unscathed.

At the same moment a cloud of smoke rises in the air, followed by a burst of flame, and the distant crackle of dry wood burning. One of the outlying abandoned huts is on fire.

Rip-rip-rip! a volley is discharged into the advance-guard. It checks them and two men fall, one like a log, the other writhing and clutching at the tussocks of grass.

The challenge is answered by the war-cry and the blowing of conch shells, a wild appalling din that drives the women closer together, and sets the children whimpering in their skirts. The dogs in the camp bark furiously. The apprehensive silence of the men is broken by oaths and imprecations.

Another burst of smoke and flame, another home in ashes.

Atai's men break out of the scrub into the cleared and cultivated land. They come in no set order, but as a cloud of locusts advancing to devastate by force of numbers.

From the right wing that touches the river, to the left that reaches the foot hills, all along the crescent line of defenders, break sharp points of flame with the vicious hiss of bullets.

Some of the on-rushing warriors pitch head-forward on the ground, others reel and fall, still others waver but come on again.

Here and there a musket shot is fired by the enemy, from arms obtained in trade, or from the sack of Focola and Fonwari, but for the greater number the weapons are arrows, spears, stone hatchets, knives and waddies.

The commanding officer sees one of his men fall by an arrow, the effect of chance rather than of

marksmanship. He gives little heed, some must fall no doubt; what holds his eyes in fearful fascination is the ever-multiplying mass of charging men; the scrub seems to be sown with dragon's teeth, to be fertile with armed savages. His little band of francs-tireurs set up against this solid body of down-charging brown humanity is but a child's wall of sand against an opposing sea.

He rides along their extended ranks, bidding them steadily retreat upon the main body of men concentrated at the huts. This they do as calmly as though they had been veterans under the great Emperor.

As they combine to meet the charge, the warriors are distant not more than a hundred yards.

Scythemen, axemen, riflemen in a pale-faced, lip-biting, oath-spitting mass, with muscles tense, eyes fixed beyond blinking and hearts almost beyond beating, they wait the charge.

"Akatika! Akatika!" They come on with animal-like bounds, the leap of the cat and the tiger, panting, open mouthed and salivating.

Crash! swish! rip The swinging axe of a settler squelches on the head of a warrior with the sound of a smashed-in gourd; the sibilant note of a scythe cleaving through the air is followed by an artery pumping from a decapitated trunk still on its feet.

The women in the stockade, free and bond, the pure and the leprous, huddle together. Some pray,

some weep, some curse, but they close in, close in, as if in the contact of many there is safety.

Clouds of smoke drift overhead, press down on them, stifle them. Their homes are burning, and ever and ever the conflict intensifies.

Atai's men have forced back the band of defenders to the lines of the old men, the feeble bulwark between the stockade and destruction.

Suddenly as if by an inspiration from Heaven, Bébé, a gross harridan from "the paddock" at Bourail who had been transported for a nameless crime in Montmartre, raises her shrill voice in the Marseillaise. Out of oaths and derisive laughter the song rises from a score of lips. It comes to the ears of the men and thrills in their hearts, lifting them out of themselves. Now they hold their own, and cut, slash, beat and thrust at the bodies of their foes till even Atai's men, glutted with the blood of Focola and Fonwari, waver and draw back. But as Atai with authoritative gesture urges them again to the attack a voice calls to him.

"Look yonder, Atai!" and as he looks in the direction of the speaker's outstretched arm he sees a swarm of men descending the further bank of the river, fording the water at the crossing-place above the settlement. They pour across like a line of ants on the track to their hill. And as he looks others also gaze, and from mouth to mouth runs the news, "Nondo's men are coming! Nondo's men!"

CHAPTER XIV

IF Atai had any hope that Nondo, his ancient foe, would throw the tribal feud to the winds and join hands with him in a revolt against the common enemy, it was speedily dissipated.

A deputation of the principal chiefs was sent to meet the incoming tribe. Meantime Atai withdrew his men to await the issue.

Nondo received the chiefs, six in all, with friendly manifestations; then of the six he slew three, and decapitating them, put their heads in baskets woven of banana leaves. He let the remaining three have their lives on condition that they carried this gift to their King. This was his answer to Atai; and Atai, as the chiefs lifted the heads from their baskets, swore a never-ending war against his treacherous enemy. Of the dead men one was a brother by his father's second wife.

Sullenly Atai drew back to the upper reaches of the river. There he camped till he could ascertain the full strength of Nondo. He left many of his warriors dead round the little eminence crowned by the rude stockade. Some of the white dead

Atai's men carried away with them slung across stout limbs of trees.

When Atai withdrew from the attack Paul Menaud rode ahead of the marching tribe straggling along without any attempt at military formation. As he crossed the cleared land the officer in charge went out from the stockade to meet him, and walked by his stirrup in eager conversation, as Menaud rode leisurely up the sloping ground.

The news of the rescue speedily reached the women, and they with the children swarmed out of the close confines of the stockade to greet their deliverer. Cecile, half-dazed with terror, her limbs so cramped that they upheld her with difficulty, watched in the crowd the approaching figures. There was something familiar to her in the bearing of the mounted man, but her faculties were too dulled by endurance of all she had gone through to enable her at once to analyse the impression. It was not indeed till he was quite close on them that, with a sharp tug at her heart, sensitised to the point of pain by nervous tension throughout the day, she recognised Paul Menaud. She put out her hand to steady herself and touched the arm of Bébé.

"Hélas! my little cabbage," remarked Bébé with a leer. "He has his day, eh, le brav' garçon? My faith! he is not too bad, eh? There was a day, my little dove, when Bébé——" But Cecile with

scared face slipped past her, and put the crowd between herself and Paul Menaud.

From the shelter of the further side of the stockade she looked over the devastated fields. The destruction wrought was pitiful. Less than half the homes remained unscathed; charred uprights, heaps of smouldering ashes, piles of still burning débris marked the sites of the rest. She saw, with dumb thankfulness to Heaven, that her father's hut was left untouched. It lay out of the immediate line of attack, and had escaped the fate of many better homes. She would return there. All danger of attack was over; already there was not a warrior of Atai's band to be seen. In the excitement attendant on the reception of their rescuer in the camp, she could cross the intervening land without detection. Picking her way with many a start and shudder as she came upon the bodies of the dead, she at length arrived at the hut.

Up to the moment of reaching it Cecile had been so engrossed with the fears that possessed her, the personal impulse to escape from the awful surroundings of the stockade, and the danger threatening her in the presence of Menaud, that her father's possible fate had been excluded from her thoughts. As she ran like a hunted creature of the woods into the covert of their home, it came to her with a fresh access of terror—what of her father? What if he were dead? She slipped down on the earth-beaten floor, her braced-up limbs relaxed. The hut

rocked before her eyes, then consciousness forsook her. When she recovered it was to find herself in bed, her father at the bedside. He had returned after searching vainly for her through the camp, the one hope left him that she had escaped to the hut. There he found her on the floor. When she had regained her senses sufficiently, she questioned him. Had he seen Paul Menaud? Had the latter recognised him? What had happened?

"Indeed yes! The brave Captain saw me and called me to him. He is a gallant fellow, my little one. Alone and unarmed he induced Nondo to come to our rescue. Had he not succeeded, none of us would have seen to-morrow's light. He asked after you, my child, and bade me bring you to him to-morrow."

"And——"

"I promised that to-morrow you would thank him with your lips. What ails thee, Cecile? Have you pain? My child——"

"Leave me for a little, father. I shall be tranquil presently. No, I shall not faint again. It is not that—oh, leave me, leave me, for a little time."

Left to herself the terrified girl endeavoured to rally her scattered wits, to marshal her thoughts into coherency. Since the encounter with Menaud near the Mission house, her attitude towards him of child-like confidence had, with the instinct of sex, changed to one of mistrust and apprehension. As time went on this fear intensified

with the realisation of the conditions of the life surrounding her. Since they had come into their concession, not all her father's watchfulness, his efforts to guard her from the contagion of the convict settlement, had succeeded in blinding her to the facts of the life around her. Daily she became conscious that with the knowledge of life, life such as she now saw it, there must be a new adjustment in her view of humanity. The youthful optimism, the complete trust of inexperience, were replaced by cognisance of the darker things of life. She realised the peril in which she stood. Alone in this remote place, her only guardian attainted of crime, subject at any moment to be taken under cover of the law from her side, what defences could she raise to repel the will of a man vested with such authority as Menaud? She saw herself in the awful dilemma of self-sacrifice—a sacrifice of such degradation that death itself became preferable—or the sacrifice of her father. With almost a stroke of the pen Menaud could strip him of the privileges they had secured. She could see him as she had seen him in the road-gang, could picture conditions for him ten times as terrible in the camp of Brun, or in the mines—all at the will of Menaud. At the thought of it she shook as if with an ague, and buried her head in the pillow to stifle the irrepressible cry that rose to her lips.

The ears of her father caught the half-suppressed sound, and he returned hastily to the room.

"What is it, my child? Let me stay with you. You are not fit to be alone."

She caught at his hand, held it, and covered it with kisses.

"My father——"

"Yes, *chérie*!"

"I cannot see the Captain Menaud to-morrow——cannot——cannot!"

"But I have promised, Cecile."

"You do not know him. You do not understand."

"Understand?" He raised his eyebrows with an expression of puzzled inquiry.

She tried to make it clear to him, speaking in low tones words that were forced to her lips with intense effort, the effort of one who brings to the surface thoughts held in the secrecy of the soul. When she had finished there was a long pause, and looking into the face of her father she saw that it was white and haggard with unspoken pain.

"There is death, Cecile—that remains to us. They shall not separate us, my child," and he gripped her arm in a grasp that made her wince. "What is death but the gift of God to His unhappy children? If need be we can take His gift in both hands, you and I. Oh! my little one, you do not fear? *Chérie*, when you were a baby I used to dream of the life I would give you—along the years I could see your face with such beauty in it as comes from love and happiness. You would

marry a good man for love—for love is better than portions. In you, Cecile, in your life, I would see all I had longed for in my own life—all that never came to me. And my little one—my baby—I have brought you to this. Why did you come to me—why did you ever leave France?”

“Father, I came to you, for all you taught me—that love is best even to death. There is a love of the blood, my father, a love such as we have.”

“Such as we have—vraiment !”

“A father and a daughter. It is a religion of the home as one might say—that we should be true to each other to the end—you and I who lived together. My mother——”

“She died when you were but a baby.” He looked aside as he uttered the saving lie.

“We had no other than ourselves, we two—what would you then, my father, but that I should come to you? If out of this life that threatens us there is no way but death, then will I take it with you gladly, hand in hand—but not until there is no other way, else would it be a sin for which there might be no forgiveness—so says the Holy Church.”

He smiled sadly at the artless saying.

“Look, my father! Is it not possible for us to escape from here? Many have found a way to Australia across the sea and have been lost there—lost to the prison. It is a country immense, they say. I have heard much about it—a great country, where men grow rich and live in peace. A

country where there is liberty and justice. Let us go now, to-night, we can escape to-night, but to-morrow we shall return to the old life. Father, I cannot see Paul Menaud, I cannot endure it, I will not!" She rose with feverish haste. "Let us get away from here. Oh, father! You cannot realise it all as I do—to-morrow will be too late. To-morrow we should meet again. It would come back to him. We could never escape him."

He left her seated on the little verandah, as he returned to the camp to procure some food. Her appeal had determined him. They would escape that night after sunset. No guard would molest them. The settlement, secure in the numbers of the rescuing tribe, would sleep in the profound slumber of intense weariness. They could creep away and cross the river before the moon was up, and then along the shallow water of the stream reach the sea-shore; before the morning the incoming tide would obliterate all traces of their footsteps. This was the plan he had thought out.

As Bertrand with a long file of men and women waited his turn to make requisition from the commissariat officer, Cecile seated on the verandah looked over the desolated fields and still smouldering homes with a great ache in her heart for the miserable ones whose toil of years was wasted, with a great pity for all the hopelessness and sin cooped up between the hills of this fertile valley. Then worn out, she lay back and fell asleep.

CHAPTER XV

THEY walked on the hard sand by the margin of the sea, where the incoming tide lapped to their bare feet and receded with a sponge-like suck. All night the thresh of waves on the reef sounded in their ears, the drift of the salt spray tingled on their faces. When the moon came up it cast dense shadows from the rib-like spurs that stretched from the coastal range. Here and there a détour had to be made round the point of a promontory. Between the shadows were patches of moonlit sand, and beyond lay the reef with its restless, ever-changing crest of white lashed water, breaking into foaming cascades that spumed down the inner side of the coral barrier. At times, as an exceptionally heavy wave thundered against this low-lying reef, the up-tossed spray was caught in the rays of moonlight, and held for a moment a faint suggestion of prismatic colours. It was a wild and beautiful scene, that carried a sense of majestic isolation and intense loneliness to the hearts of the escapés.

As the tide rose, they were driven inward towards the steep rocky shore line. When morning

broke they looked up at the brown and sepia-tinted coastal rocks rising precipitously from the thin belt of still uncovered sand. On the heights above, fissures and breaks indicated the volcanic action of the past. Mangroves masked the entrance to oozy, slime-covered inlets. The rugged acclivities were densely clothed with the dark and sage-tinted foliage of pines and niaoulis.

They had brought with them a stock of food. From one of the many trickling streams of water that dripped from the overhanging rocks they filled a can, and under a shelving cave lit a fire. The roof would help to dissipate the smoke, and prevent it rising in a column to the sky to be an index to possible pursuers. Bertrand climbed the steeply-rising ground, and here and there in pockets of soil formed by down-swept detritus, found a few roots of the small but sweet wild-taro. These they baked in the ashes of their fire, thus economising their store of food. After a brief rest they went on their way, making the most of the early morning. Later, when the heat of the noon-day sun became intense, they would seek out some cool, sheltered spot, and sleep.

Traversing a stretch of desolate coast that had been devastated by a bush fire, leaving only the charred trunks of twisted niaoulis standing, they reached an extended crescent of shell-strewn beach, backed by gently rising uplands; a valley covered with dense vegetation through which, from the

highlands whose rugged peaks were visible against the blue distance, flowed a stream of water. They turned aside, and waded in the shallows by the vine-tangled and almost impenetrable banks for some distance, till the sea was lost to sight, though the song of the surf beating with rhythmical percussion on the beach, still hummed in their ears. As they went on, the air became moist and heavy, the glare of the sun tempered by the overhanging foliage to a dim green light. With his jack-knife Bertrand cut a little clearing in the thicket on the bank, and gathering reeds and leafage made a resting place. They ate a little food, and drank sparingly of the ice-cold water of the stream; then, wearied beyond further endurance, lay down, and despite the torment of mosquitoes fell into deep sleep. When they woke the tempered light had deepened. There were no longer spats of sunlight like splashes of bright gold showered on the leafage. The light was diffused into a monotone, and, looking up to the broken spaces of sky above them, Bertrand saw the warm violet glow of closing day. The cry of a cagou, a monotonous and mournful note, startled them, and Cecile, in fear of the thus accentuated silence and the coming night, drew closer to her father's side. She had felt no fear last night with the never-ceasing roar of the sea in her ears, but here, in a silence broken only by the cry of the bird and the falling of an occasional twig from the trees, a nervous terror beset her.

For a while they talked together in an undertone.

Suddenly Bertrand rose and stood intent. His ears had caught a distant sound.

"Listen, Cecile! There—there—do you hear it?"

She strained her ears and waited breathlessly for a repetition of the faint sound. It came with increased distinctness.

"What is it?" she whispered. "It is coming nearer, father."

"It is a boat. Do you hear the creak of the oars in the rowlocks—their splash in the water? It is a boat, Cecile, beyond doubt, a boat."

"Heavenly Father! They have followed us."

"No! No! It is but one pair of oars. Perhaps up the stream there may be a settlement."

Together they crept to the extreme edge of the bank, and looked down the river. A few hundred yards below them it curved, and their view was blocked by the heavily-wooded bank. Then as they watched they saw the bow of a boat come round the curve till its side was exposed. In it was but one man, the rower. He had all his work to do pulling the heavy boat against the stream, and made slow progress.

As the boat, taking the outer margin of the curve, came nearer, they saw that it would pass within a few yards of where they stood. Hemmed in by almost impenetrable undergrowth they could

not escape, the only way was the one up which the boat was making its laboured passage.

As they stood motionless, waiting with a sense of fate in their hearts for the inevitable, Bertrand noted the ragged blouse and tattered straw hat of the rower, whose face was as yet concealed from them. They were familiar, only too familiar to him. There was an identity about them that could not be mistaken. It was the uniform of the prison.

He whispered in Cecile's ear, "An évadé!"

The boat came abreast of their little clearing. The rower with bent head straining at his task did not lift his eyes, and for a moment, as father and daughter stood bracing themselves to immobility, a faint hope possessed them that after all they might escape unseen. The momentary reaction was its own undoing. Bertrand felt a quiver through the limbs of Cecile pressed close to his side, and then her hold on him relaxed inch by inch. He tried to steady her against himself, but it meant either a change of position or their fall together. She had fainted. Bertrand instinctively caught the dead weight of her body in his arms, and the sound of the movement roused the rower from his lethargy. A rapid glance disclosed them. In the momentary surprise he ceased rowing.

Bertrand, letting the girl fall at his feet on the gathered brushwood, held up his arms to show he was defenceless.

Even as he spoke the boat repassed them on the

swift down current of the stream. The rower with a curse bent to the oars. He pulled further out from the bank, and when again he came abreast of them, parleyed.

Bertrand answered his questions with no attempt at concealment. There was the camaraderie of the prison between them. Dog did not eat dog. He frankly explained their situation.

When the évadé was convinced that the two intruders on the seclusion of his retreat were but unarmed escapés, he ran the boat's nose into the reed-margined bank, and quickly alighting, tied her to a stout sapling. Meantime Bertrand was endeavouring to restore Cecile to consciousness. The évadé brought water in his hat, and their efforts were rewarded by the girl's restoration to her senses. Bertrand pillowed her head on an armful of leaves, and as she lay there, inert and speechless, the two men conversed.

"Have you any tobacco, my friend?" inquired the évadé.

Bertrand produced from the bundle containing their stock of food an unbroken packet of Petit Caporal.

"It is yours."

The eyes of the évadé glistened as he took the gift in his hand.

"What is your name?"

"Bertrand; and yours?"

"Cacalouch! Number 1759. What matter? It

is of no account!" He filled his pipe, a rank, foul pipe that had been treasured for many a day with the hope of ultimately filling it. "Bertrand," and he paused to let the blue smoke filter slowly through his nose, as if the coarse Algerian tobacco fumes were the delicate fragrance of a Turkish cigarette, "it is a whole month since I had a smoke—realise that, my friend!"

Bertrand lit his own pipe, and they sat together in the community which draws tobacco-lovers to each other.

"The mademoiselle?" and Cacalouch gave a twist of his deck in her direction.

"My daughter."

"Also late of the prison, eh?"

"No. She joined me here."

"Ah!" and Cacalouch for a space devoted himself to his pipe.

Bertrand was the first to break the pause. He had scanned the man, and the impression was not unfavourable. During the long night walk along the sea-shore he had cudgelled his brains to formulate some definite course of action. The sudden resolution to escape had been but a blind impulse to elude a present danger to his daughter. They would escape somehow, and find refuge somewhere. At the time it took no more definite form than this; but they could not continue to wander thus aimlessly. They must have a definite scheme. Fortune had thrown them into the hands of this man. Might

it not be that Fortune had so designed it that their end might be attained?

"Have you been long in this place, comrade?"

"No. It is but a bare month since Maurice and I escaped. He is but a boy, Maurice. As for myself I can bear much, but this youngster—he has not the strength of a girl."

"Where were you?"

"At Camp Brun!"

"Camp Brun!"

"So! It is hell! If you say Camp Brun you say hell. See, my friend, it was thus. This boy Maurice, he was sent here for some trifle—a robbery of bonds from a bank where he was clerk. It was so, I think. We were in the atelier at Ile Nou. As for me, I am a cabinet maker—an honest man and none better in the trade, Bertrand, though I say it. My affair was an accident with a prodigious brute of a gendarme—the miserable one all but died. It was unfortunate! So I am here—an honest man, a good tradesman, a patriot, my faith! Vive la France! It is a magnificent nation, Bertrand, but for the canaille of a Government we have. What! to transport an honest man such as I, Cacalouch, of the best in my trade, for an accident with a dog of a gendarme! What times, my friend! What times indeed! But of this boy Maurice. He was put with me to learn an honest trade—and the boy was happy. Truly he had reason, for I spared no pains to teach him—no father could have done more for

a son than I did for Maurice. It is, however, my glory to have a high spirit, Bertrand, such a spirit as the sons of France should have. I had it of my father, who had it of Corporal Cacalouch of the Old Guard, his father. The great Emperor made much of him. It was after Jena he made him Corporal. Had the old man lived he might have been a General—and I, Cacalouch, drinking wine and killing rabbits on my own estate, eh? One day a gross pig of a Surveillant who knew nothing of the refinements of our trade, an ignorant fellow who could not tell a mortice joint from a tenon, reported me. Me, Cacalouch, for waste of glue—so he put it. For this they gave me two days in the cells. I waited for my fine fellow till he came round one day—pig as he was!—and then my spirit rising, Bertrand, till it was not to be controlled, I spat in his face. He drew his revolver, and the boy Maurice sprang at him like a cat. My faith! there was a scene! The revolver went off, and the bullet hit an old forçat in the calf. He bellowed, and the Surveillant swore as the boy Maurice clung to him and bit his hand. What trouble! They had us before the Council of War and sent us to the Camp.” He paused and relit his pipe.

“Well, what happened there?”

There was a change in the half-humorous intonation of the man’s voice as he had recited the scene at the atelier. “That is the devil of a place, Bertrand. At the atelier it was not too bad. We

chatted and even sang at our work, and did not overdo it. We rested now and then—had a little smoke. Through the open door came a breath of the sea-air; one could look out and see the blue water and the reef. It was good also to feel the plane under one's hand, to see the shavings curl and smell the scent of wood. One felt a little joy in one's heart in those days; but at Camp Brun! Oh, mon Dieu! All day we worked on the road—the big road through the island. My hands had grown soft in the atelier, for such work as that—but they were nothing to the hands of Maurice—they were raw, like meat. They worked us in the double chain—such a crime is it to spit in the face of a Surveillant! The second day we were there, Maurice dropped on the road—as your daughter there. It was a furnace of a day, and even I sweated like a brute beast. The ganger kicked him as he lay, but the boy could not rise; so he kicked him again, and Maurice groaned. Such is this spirit of mine, my friend, that it again became uncontrollable. All swam before me, red as a flamboyant tree; and when it was passed and I was calm again, the ganger lay on the ground, stretched there by my blow. My friend, I have a blow tremendous. It is like the English for a blow—stupendous! Feel there, Bertrand, there,” and he extended a muscular arm for critical inspection.

“Truly a fine arm!”

“Well, they made short work of it. The Ca-

naques would have murdered us then and there. The Canaques of the police are demons, nothing less. One rascal had his club raised to batter in my head, when by hazard the Surveillant of the gang arrived and saved me the stroke. They took us to the cell and stripped us almost as naked as the day we were born. It was a vile hole, and we lay there all night on the floor. There was scarce a breath of air. Bertrand, if I live till I am a hundred years old—which God forbid!—I shall not forget that night. Here the mosquitoes are bad; they bite your hands, your face, but the hands and face are hardened. What little discomfort is that! But we were almost naked, and in an hour our bodies were aflame. It was as if the fire of hell consumed us. Maurice is but a lad, and has not the endurance of us older ones. It was pitiful to hear him weep. He raised himself by his hands to the little wicket at the top of the door and implored them to let us out, to give us at least some clothing. He was like a child indeed, he made such promises if they would but let us out. They gave us no food. We did not mind that, but we would have sold our souls to the devil himself for a drink of water. Maurice cried for water till his shrieks brought a Canaque to the door, and he beat on it with his club to silence him. Maurice clambered up to the wicket again and raved for water. Even a few drops! But we might as well have asked the stones for water. In the end it became so bad with the poor

lad that I thought death would end it for him. From weeping and promises he passed into such wild passion that he became like one possessed. In the end he fell exhausted, and lay moaning in a corner of the cell, all callous to the torments of the mosquitoes. I must have dropped into sleep near morning, for when I woke the light was falling through the wicket and I could see the boy huddled up in a corner, his body swollen and as red as a homard. It was scarred, as if by thorns, where he had torn the skin with his nails. I thought him dead, but called 'Maurice! Maurice!' to see if life were still in him. He answered, turned and crawled to me like a dog. 'Cacalouch,' he said, 'for the love you had for your mother when you were a little one, kill me,' and he took my hand and put it to his throat. 'Oh, Cacalouch, kill me, kill me!' and he looked so in his eyes, *mon ami*; you know the look. Like a woman's look indeed, and my heart went as water. Thus we sat together and cried like the children. I am not ashamed to confess it, not I. When at length we were composed I tried to put courage in his heart—for in the end, Bertrand, my spirit is such that it rises triumphant. It is deep-laid. I had it of my father who had it——"

"Truly, my friend. You have said it."

"It is such a spirit that if but laid to rest for a while it rises——"

"Indeed so! But what happened then?"

"In the morning they took us out. Such misérables! I concealed my spirit, comrade—for if anything I am politic, I am not one for needless violence—this diplomacy I had of my mother, who indeed had need for much of this art with my father. She had it of her——"

"True! true! But what further of you and this boy Maurice?"

"They gave us our clothes. We had water. My faith! I could have drunk this river dry—but perhaps it was better we had but the little they gave us. Before they let us out that morning, Maurice and I had sworn to escape. If not, then I was to kill him as he had besought me. He made me pledge this, and confident of the spirit within me I gave the pledge. Not indeed that I would have carried it out, for a pledge under such circumstances counts not, eh? Such is the law, is it not?"

"So it may be." Bertrand was surprised to see his companion throw himself on the ground and laugh heartily.

"Pardon! It always affects me thus when I think of it. All the day long as I worked on the road I had thought and thought how we were to escape, and in the end it was like a child's play. At night the two Canaques marched us to the cell. They told us to strip as on the night before—and I saw Maurice with an awful fear in his eyes make as if to obey. The door was open and a Canaque stood one at each side of us. Suddenly my mother's

wit came to me. I gazed into the cell, it was but dimly lit by the evening light. I pointed with my finger first here, then there, and the Canaques followed my finger with a sort of childish curiosity—they are but devil children, these wretches. Then I pointed again, now here, now there, inside the cell, and made as if it were some strange thing I saw within. The Canaques are as curious as cats. They could not resist. Like cats on their soft foot-pads they crept to the door and gazed in open-mouthed.

“ ‘Now, Maurice!’ I cried. The boy has quick wits—he is a lad of great intelligence, but lacks spirit to make a man of him. He saw my meaning. With a thrust we had them pell-mell in the cell, and with a mighty swing of my arm I closed the door on them and slipped the bolt. It was dark by this time, and together we fled to the bush; the accursed chains cumbered us, and we made but slow progress, though never had they felt so light as at that hour. It was wonderful how Maurice, with but half my strength, still fought his way, chains and all, into the scrub. We made for a valley where there was water. No doubt the Canaques would raise a cry to wake the dead, but so had we the night before, and perhaps this would put off suspicion. The cell was a sort of cavern cut into the rock and walled up in front. It was away from the main camp a fair distance, and many a night before I had heard the cries of wretched creatures in the

night from this cell—yet none heeded them. Well, to make it short, my friend, we followed the stream down the valley all night, nor did we rest till the first light of dawn. Then with a heavy stone I beat the irons on Maurice's ankles into ovals, and forced the feet through. He did the same for me, and when I was free we threw the vile chains into the stream. That day we made the shore and followed it down. For three days we travelled thus, hiding among the rocks if a ship or boat came in sight. At length we reached this river, and following it up came to a great cave well hidden in the base of the mountain from which the river itself is fed. When we reached there we were exhausted beyond measure and empty as kettledrums. My faith! they might have beaten the tattoo on us. Along the shore we had fed on mussels and such shell food as we could find. One day we turned a turtle on a sand bank and ate of its flesh raw. Bah! it is not good thus, but what would you in such a case? The last two days we had but a few wild-taro and some oysters. The cave I speak of was filled with rousettes, those fellows like rats with wings. Maurice, when first he saw their eyes sparkling in the darkness, was taken with a palsy of fear. Truly they were not unlike devils. A few we killed and ate with loathing, though it is said the rousette when roasted is good fare. To come to a conclusion we existed thus for a time, when my spirit reviving within me, I set out for the

coast to make reconnaissance. I had it in mind to follow this coast till I came to a settlement; for along here I had been told are some islands where sheep are run. I had agreed with Maurice to return within two days. He was inspired with hope when I spoke of the sheep. The thought of a sheep at such times is, my friend, an inspiration. The first day I saw no sign of any settlement; but after dark as I was disposing myself to sleep on the sand, I saw in the distance a fire. It was among the rocks. 'My brave Cacalouch,' said I, 'it may be the star of thy destiny, this little spark of fire. Rouse thyself! On! advance!' My legs, Bertrand, were tired beyond expression, but the spirit I had of my father, who had it——"

"Of your grandfather at Jena. You have said it. Well, of this light?"

"When I came close to it, padding on the soft sand so that none should know of my approach——this resource, this diplomacy——"

"You had of your mother, truly; but hasten on, my friend. It is already dark, soon the moon will rise. My poor Cecile!" and he touched tenderly the recumbent girl.

"This light," continued the discursive Cacalouch, impervious to all hinted impatience, "was the camp fire of some sailors who had been turtle-hunting on a sand bank at this place. I saw three fat turtle on their backs high up the bank. The fire was low down, heaped up with dry leaves and damp

stuff that made a great smoke to keep off the accursed mosquitoes. It was doubtless this smoke in which they slept that made the three men lie as if logs. Though I crept within a few yards of them they gave no sign of life, except for the prodigious snoring of one gross fellow fatter than the turtles. Now I had in my mind, Bertrand, which as I have said is one of caution, of much foresight, and has such qualities of the thing politic or such as should——”

“In the name of God! What happened?” exclaimed Bertrand, losing patience.

“As I thus resolved matters in my mind, my eye caught the outline of a boat drawn up on the sand—yet not so far distant from the water but that by the exercise of my great strength of arm——”

“You shoved it off, got into it, rowed away, came up the river and reached the cave without detection. Indeed was it not thus?”

Cacalouch felt momentarily aggrieved at this abrupt conclusion of his narrative, but being a good-humoured rascal, took it in good part.

“Truly, friend Bertrand, you would make a good surgeon, for you cut with decision.”

“I am both surgeon and physician.”

“Comment! A physician?”

“Yes!”

“Truly this is my day. Such fortune! I have found a physician with matches and tobacco. That I should have found such a one! To-night, Ber-

trand, we shall have roast roussette. The boy Maurice shall smoke of your tobacco, and you shall prescribe for him. Truly there is no pharmacy at hand, but the act of prescribing is in itself a medicine to the faint heart. When the moon comes up we shall take to the river. The cave is but a fair row from here. You approve, comrade?"

"Approve indeed—and more, we thank you, brave Cacalouch. Was it many nights since you took the boat—may you not be followed?"

"Had you but listened I should have made it clear to you. It was two weeks ago or thereabout. To-day I went down the river to reconnoitre and get some oysters. There was no soul in sight. It is well, friend Bertrand, to have an ordered mind, such as puts all matters in due place. The setting forth of events as was the manner——"

"It is excellent, no doubt. But look—the moon!" and as he spoke the darkness became diffused with the light of the rising moon.

"Cecile! wake, my child! Chérie, wake! We are near rest and food. The good Cacalouch will take us to his home. Wake, little one, rouse thyself. Do not fear. It is but thy father and Cacalouch, our friend!"

As the moon rose higher, the rippling water caught its rays and fretted them upon its surface. Black bats or vampires—the roussettes that found a home in the mountain caves—flitted across the open skyway above the river.

They helped the wearied girl into the boat, and Cacalouch of the indomitable spirit cast off from the bank. As he put his back lustily into the rowing of their little craft he chanted:—

“Il était une bergère
 Eh ! ron, ron, ron, petit patapon.
 Il était une bergère
 Qui gardait ses moutons;
 Ron, ron,
 Qui gardait ses moutons.”

And soon Cecile's voice joined with the others in the familiar “ron, ron, ron, petit patapon,” and as she lay back in the stern of the boat, looking up at the cloudless star-scattered sky, her thoughts went back to the dear old home in Passy. “Ron, ron, ron, petit patapon.” How often had she sung thus, seated on her father's knee and pressed close to his heart!

CHAPTER XVI

TO Maurice the arrival of the strangers was an event of great moment. The presence in their camp of a young mademoiselle gave a fillip to life. It roused him from inaction. All was not at an end so long as there was a woman to be impressed. Not since their establishment in the bats' cave had Cacalouch witnessed such activity on the part of his young comrade in misfortune.

It was Maurice who, with many a minatory gesture and much show of intrepidity, cleared a smaller cave of its clusters of bright-eyed rousettes for the shelter of Cecile. Inwardly he feared the beating of their foul wings about his head, but outwardly he bore himself with valour. It was he who lit a fire in the cave to purify it with smoke, and the sight of the bright flames and the crisp sound of the crackling wood cheered them amazingly. There was now little need of the physician's prescription. He gathered bracken and foliage to make Cecile a soft couch, and when all was done, and they sat together in the larger cave roasting taro in the embers of the fire, he gazed in mute admiration at

the girl thus brought as if from the clouds into the isolation of their hiding-place.

Cacalouch unfolded to Bertrand his plans for the future. In the boat he had found a sail—small, old, and patched, but still a sail—a hatchet, water-keg, and kellick. The boat itself had seen much rough usage and leaked freely, but his skill as a craftsman would soon put right all such defects. Then they would gather a store of food; there were edible roots, wild fruits, and further down the coast he had seen some cocoanut palms; they would gather the green nuts full of acid-sweet milk. The scrub held many pigeons; these they would snare, then spit and dry them in the smoke; some of their old friends the rousettes could be thus used also. Oh, there was plenty to be had, plenty! If he, Cacalouch, could but light on a banana patch! But they must not go far afield. Then when all was ready, their stock of food complete, some day they would take the boat down to the shore, and at the last flush of daylight set out for Queensland. It was but a journey of some few weeks, perhaps a month or more. Many had accomplished it. They had but to go west, follow the setting sun. Any imbecile could do that. Certainly they could not go wrong with the sun to guide them. Every night as it set they would remember that there lay freedom, home—why not fortune? Eh, why not? and Cacalouch in the excitement of his

vision rose, and strutted the floor of the cave with the air of a new Columbus.

"It has been done, mademoiselle. Not once or twice, but many times repeated. Pestel to think that I, Cacalouch, should fail in such a trifle. I whom my father endowed with the spirit of adventure, of enterprise, of—bah! it is impossible but that we shall succeed. Mademoiselle and her father are my guests; they are honoured passengers. I, Cacalouch, will accomplish all; let there be no fear. As to Maurice it will make a man of him; he will thus see what is possible to a spirit that knows not fear nor despair, nor fails at a critical moment, yet is guided by good policy, by discretion, by the diplomacy one needs in matters such as this. As for me I shall establish myself on the land, which I have been told is freely given in that country to men of worth. There I shall grow vines and make wine; also I shall plant olives, and breed horses; truly I shall have some horses; of cattle and sheep also. I shall become a maire and wear a scarf. To me will be the duty of the civil marriage. My faith! I shall give them good advice; to the woman, it is well to obey her husband, to see that he is cared for, to look well to the little economies of herself and the infants. Indeed it is a fair picture. Parbleu! I shall become a representative in the legislature. Why not a Governor? It sounds well, 'His Excellency Milord Cacalouch.' To a man of spirit, of such resource

as I have here within me, it is possible—all things are possible. Why not, eh?"

And seeing Cacalouch strut, and pout his breast like a pigeon, the spirit of optimism possessed them. Cecile dreamt a fair dream of distant peace and love and little children at her knee. That night she slept in tranquil rest on her bed of leaves within the little cave.

Early in the morning, as the first faint twitter of the scrub birds rousing from rest sounded in her ears, she crept from the camp and climbed the rocks to where a pool lay in a cup-like basin that caught the mountain stream. There she bathed in the pure, sweet water, the cascade from above covering her with its veil of spray.

On her return she found Cacalouch building a fire for the morning meal. Now that he had a supply of matches uncooked viands were little to his taste. Bertrand still slept. Maurice had been sent to gather wild plums and nuts.

Bertrand roused and Maurice back, they made their primitive meal. Cacalouch monopolised the conversation. It was all of their plans. He was impatient to set about the projected voyage. He gave orders to each individually, amended them, issued fresh instructions without number till, all being finely confused as to what they ought to set about, he abused them roundly for want of personal initiative. They were but as infants who needed direction at every hand's turn. Half the morning

was wasted before Bertrand, with the expenditure of much patience, evolved something like order out of the chaos created by the brave Cacalouch. To Cecile, who, woman-like, had brought with her the materials for sewing, an overhaul of the sail was committed. The sail-cloth was, though patched, fortunately but slightly damaged, else her delicate needles had proved but little use. Still the work, such as it was, gave her, as Bertrand had designed it to do, a sense of helping in the general task. To Cacalouch was given the task of making their craft seaworthy. She was clinker built and had been apparently a ship's boat, well-proportioned, a comparatively small but sufficiently roomy craft for so small a crew. She was fitted with a short mast, her sail being that known as "a dipping lug." Unfortunately she was far from dry. By their united efforts they drew her up on the bank, where Cacalouch with the aid of one of the metal rowlocks and a piece of stone hardened-up the rivets in her planks. What he would have liked, he explained, would have been to finish the job with an interior coat of tar and sand. That, however, was out of the question. Bertrand gave such slight assistance as he could, making his companion's task the lighter by the willing ear he lent to much voluble discourse.

"There are few matters I do not know, mon ami, touching the matter of sea craft. Was I not a sea-urchin as one might say? My father was a

Breton fisherman. Truly there are none like the Bretons; though, had my grandfather but lived, such a fine spirit had not been wasted on the netting of fishes. My faith! it was such humiliation as leads to the little glass; and had it not been for the capacity for large designs, matters of foresight and diplomacy my mother possessed, it would have fared ill with our young stomachs in those days. It was the inheritance from my father that made me such as I am, Bertrand, such as I am. We were much together; and many a time when, feeling the humiliation beyond endurance, my father—and for such men there is much excuse—had sought the little glass, I handled the boat alone. I, a mere child, yet with such daring! such excellence of judgment as came from my mother's side, would bring the boat home, and run her high up on the beach full before the wind. Ha! I feel the thrill of it in my blood—the lifting motion, the grate of the keel on the sand. Then down sail and home! If one could but shut out the voice of the good mother as the father Cacalouch arrived home in such condition as wives like not, and the vile smell of smoked fish in the hut—it would indeed be a memory to dwell on! It was this same smell of smoked fish that so beset my mother when my father died by reason of the frequency of little glasses, that she said she would get far inland where a fish is seen but at Lent. This she did, and married a cabinet maker, a creature of little spirit indeed, who saved

sous and acted under the discretion of my mother with all humility."

"Then we may have no fear in trusting ourselves to your skill, my friend?"

"Fear! It is not my manner to talk as might be the habit of a fanfaron or a mere flaneur, a creature of no performance! Not I, indeed! I am, if aught, a man of spirit, of action, of resource."

"So indeed! But, my good Cacalouch, it seems to me that without some knowledge of the perils in these seas, even such skill as yours may be at fault."

"Attend, attend! Talk not so much, comrade. This excess of talk leaves no room for the explanation of things. Listen! When at the atelier there worked near me a little man who had made the voyage, he and three others. They had indeed a terrible time, being men of little intelligence and with only such experience as would suffice to sail a paper boat in a duck pond. Still they reached land, and had they possessed the wit of goats only, and made for the hills, they would have escaped. Instead they kept to the coast, reached Rockhampton, and were pounced on by the English gendarmes who are ever on the lookout for évadés. Such is it, Bertrand, to have not even the wit of animals!"

"Indeed they had not the good fortune to have such a mother as thine."

"Well said, my friend, well said! Of this man I obtained a great store of information concerning

the winds, the due direction and the perils of the great reef that stretches along the coast of that country. He drew it thus with a splinter in the sawdust. Here are we on this coast. Yonder, some eighteen hundred leagues due west or thereabout, lie many reefs, guano islands, and such like. It is well to make for these, there to renew our stock. My little comrade described these islands as one might a netful of *écrevisse*, so many are they. Thence northeast to the great barrier I have spoken of, and once within it—for if not too far north it is broken by deep sea-ways at many points—one sees the high mountain—*peste!* I forget her name—and the coast of this Queensland. Thus——”

As he spoke he roughly delineated a plan on the sand at his feet. “As to the rest, once we touch land confide absolutely in your *Cacalouch*. I have within me, Bertrand, such resources of design, of contrivance, of stratagem, as will suffice to bring us safely through. For my own part I have it in mind to plant some vine-yards. It is such an occupation.”

“Yes! you have thus said before, my friend.”

When they had hardened up the last of the rivets *Cacalouch* cast a critical eye over the boat, and, doubtful of her sufficiency of keel to sail close to the wind, determined to construct a rough false keel and fix it by dowels. For this purpose he took the hatchet and went into the scrub.

Meantime Maurice had been sent to explore the bush back from the river. He returned late in the afternoon with a harvest of wild taro. These were to be well roasted and put aside for food in the earlier days of the voyage.

That night, after the evening meal, they again sat round Cacalouch listening to his long recitals, as, by the dim light of a small fire—they dared not risk a larger one—he trimmed with the hatchet the lines of the false keel for their boat.

Next morning he fixed the keel, and together they relaunched the boat. Bertrand suggested that it might be well for Cacalouch to venture down the river once again and make further reconnaissance of the shore line to the south. It would also be a valuable addition to their stores if he could bring back some of the cocoanuts he had seen. There was a smack of adventure about this proposal that fitted the spirit of the *évadé*.

Cacalouch having departed, Bertrand set about his own task of skinning dead roussettes, of which they had killed many in the neighbouring caves. When they were skinned he cured them in the smoke of the fire lit under the overhanging roof of the cave. This smoke which, though diffused, still rose above the tree tops, was a source of anxiety to him. It was improbable that the theft of the boat would be allowed to go without some effort for its recovery. Indeed the fact that the stolen article was a boat would in itself excite suspicion,

and the news be conveyed to official ears. He thought as he moved about his work, blinking in the acrid smoke, that perhaps it had been better if Cacalouch had not left the camp. However, it was now too late to recall him.

By the end of the day he had twenty-three of the small carcasses skinned and smoked. As an article of food he confessed to himself they did not look too appetising. It was resolved, without dissentient voice from the younger comrades, that roussette as a standard dish should, till the voyage was entered on, be set aside.

Under the instruction of Maurice, who had learned the trick from the Canaques in Camp Brun, Cecile made and set some snares for the smaller birds. Maurice himself went into the bush, and returned with a quantity of fruit from a resinous tree. They contained a dense viscid pulp with which he smeared the leaves of some trees where he had seen the nests and heard the notes of wood doves.

On the following morning when they visited these snares and limed branches they captured a number of birds. A few were appropriated for immediate use, the rest Bertrand smoked and added to his stock.

CHAPTER XVII

EARLY in the morning of the third day since the departure of Cacalouch, Cecile, returning from the pool where she bathed daily, caught the sound of oars on the river. She woke her father and Maurice, both of whom slept more heavily than she.

The quick ears of the girl had noted a lack of vigour in the stroke. It was slow, and the oars dragged in the rowlocks. She conveyed her apprehension of trouble to the others, and together they waited anxiously for the coming of the boat.

When Cacalouch, giving a final pull, ran her nose into the bank and shipped his oars, he turned a pale and haggard face to them.

"Mes amis, such adventures! It is indeed a miracle that I have survived them. Bertrand, your hand, for I have need of it. Indeed I am as stiff as a dried cod-fish, and had it not been I, Cacalouch, I had well been dead as such." He rose with difficulty from the seat and stepped ashore, then accompanied them to the cave, where he threw himself wearily on a pile of dried bracken.

"Get me some meat, Maurice, mon enfant. I

have such an indigestion of cocoanuts as might well end an ordinary man such as thou or Bertrand there. Truly 'tis but food for Canaques. Eh! a pigeon! That is good. Now had we but the little peas! It is well to have Christian food again, my friends." He rubbed his hands with evident satisfaction as Maurice spitted a pigeon, and placed it on the fire newly lit. "Look you, comrades, we must away from here, and in all speed!"

They bent eagerly forward as Bertrand queried, "Are we then in such danger, Cacalouch? What befell you?"

"What indeed befell me! Listen! It was thus: Maurice, my little one, see to the bird! a pigeon needs such delicacy in handling as a mother would her babe. Not so, my son, but thus!" and he turned the pigeon on the fire with the air of a chef preparing a banquet. "It was thus: I reached the mouth of the river and concealed the boat, then made my way in the direction whence I had first brought her. At the cocotiers I made a halt and prepared to climb the trees after the manner of the indigènes. My faith! that same manner is not as easy of conquest as you might think. I had well nigh broken my back three times before I reached the nuts. However, I knew not how to desist. It is so with me, Bertrand, that having once set my mind to a task it must be accomplished or I, Cacalouch, die in the attempt. It was thus with my father, who had it——"

"You secured the nuts—what else?"

"There I rested for the night, and next day made two journeys backward and forward carrying the nuts to the boat."

"Would it not have been easier to take the boat to the nuts?" queried Cecile innocently.

Cacalouch paused in the act of tenderly adjusting the spitted pigeon, and gazed at her with commiseration. "It is but natural Ma'am'selle should so inquire. Rarely is it that her sex is endowed with such qualities of the art diplomatic as the good mother. It is of the first importance in such matters that the object of attention—the root of the matter should be concealed. As it were in an argument I should——"

"Enough! Enough! let us get on, good Cacalouch. It is obvious of course. The boat might have attracted attention from some passing craft. Then, then, my friend, then——"

"The bird is done to perfection. Be patient, comrade—be patient! Would you thus hasten a man at such a moment? It is well seen that an indigestion of cocoanuts is unknown to you."

Bertrand sighed, and possessed his soul in patience as Cacalouch picked the bones of the pigeon till not a fragment of meat remained.

"Well! having disposed of the nuts what followed?"

"I had it in mind to pursue the matter further. Although I have heard there is but slight settle-

ment along this coast, still the military posts are fixed at certain intervals without regard to settlement. They form as it were a ring round this devil's island."

"But why seek danger needlessly? We know there is no post near the river mouth. Should not that suffice?"

"My poor Bertrand! Know you not that it is of the very essence of all strategy that one should be first of all possessed of an exact knowledge of the danger to be met, to be averted, to be compassed——"

"Hélas! I confess, Cacalouch, I am no strategist. To stir up a hive of bees to be assured that they are there! May the saints keep me from all such strategy! Well?"

"On the evening of the second day I penetrated far south and came on such a post as I describe. Had it not been for an accursed dog——"

"Then you were seen and pursued? Thus much for strategy, my Cacalouch."

"Look you, friend Bertrand, it was not the strategy that was at fault, it was the accursed dog. One counts not in such matters on a dog—by all rules there had been no dog."

"Parbleu—he is mad!" commented Bertrand to himself dejectedly.

"He was such a dog, my friends, as I have rarely seen. The redness of his jaws was such, and the green light in his eyes of a kind——"

"That you ran, brave Cacalouch. Had it been I, I should most certainly have run."

"Had it not been for the gift I had of my mother it was in me to meet him and drag the gross tongue from his prodigious jaws——"

"However, you ran. What followed?"

"The noise of this monster roused two vile Canaques, armed with clubs. We ran, all four—I myself, the dog, and the Canaques. In such order was it. It is in me to offer many candles at the altar when I am settled in this Queensland, and have some money from the vineyard. My faith! how I did run—but to the water, my friend. This kind of dog, I argued, will not take to the water. It is your only chance, Cacalouch. En avant to the water! By the grace of Heaven the moon was not yet up. The prodigious animal, he was in truth of such size as the bears in the Jardin d'Acclimation, was at my heels when I reached it. I am master of all arts in swimming—there is nothing you can teach me in such matters. Let me but touch the water and I am at home like the fishes. Also by the grace of the bon Dieu the surf was not heavy that night, so that I could make headway against it. When I was well out I could hear the Canaques along the shore shouting. Had it not been for the darkness hiding me they would assuredly have followed—for they are good swimmers, though I say it. The accursed dog howled for it might be a good half hour. I was so

worn with swimming, that when at last I heard neither dog nor Canaques I had like to die from fatigue. Then I came close in and made my way, with the water sucking me back ever, as it were, till the moon rose, and with much precaution I crept under the shelter of some mangroves to the shore. There I rested for an hour and went on. I reached the boat like one dead—so little spirit was there in me. It was indeed a performance most marvellous. I have both read and heard of many escapes, of much endurance by brave men, but—though I say it as one who holds all boasting to ill-become a man of true courage——”

“It was indeed a marvellous performance. But you fear we are in immediate danger, Cacalouch?”

“Bertrand, it is thus: we must go at once—this very night. These accursed Canaque gendarmes are beyond all doubt the very devil—but it is from the dog we have the most to fear. These dogs are so kept that they shall track évadés such as we—by the nose. Have I not heard many terrible tales of unfortunate condamnés thus run to earth! If they reach the mouth of the river this beast will nose in the scrub till he scents one. It is wonderful the power they have in this respect. We must go at once, comrades.”

Impressed by the words of the évadé, they concluded a hasty meal, and set about the work of loading their boat with the food they had collected. Their intention was to take it as near to the river

mouth as possible without absolute exposure, then at sundown to set out to sea.

It was with a touch of regret in her heart that Cecile, as they drifted down the river, gave a last glance at the cave that had for a little time sheltered her and her father from the outer world and its terrors, where Maurice and the brave Cacalouch had extended to them a haven from their enemies.

It was well into the afternoon when they reached the river mouth. They ate a little food, and remained in the boat drawn close under the shelter of the overhanging scrub. Speaking little, and then in whispers, the sense of danger oppressed them like a cloud. Cacalouch, overwrought with the effort of his recent escape, slept heavily in the bottom of the boat. Bertrand kept guard, Cecile and Maurice sitting listlessly in the stern.

As the afternoon closed in, a sullen silence—frequently the premonition of a storm—brooded over sea and land. Bertrand looked up at the sky with apprehension. A few small clouds scurried across the blue space—the advance guard of an oncoming army. As he did so, his ear, alert with an acuteness that seemed to borrow its tensility from the electrical disturbance in the air, caught a distant sound. His face blanched white.

“Cacalouch! wake! wake!”

Cacalouch was sunk in the deep dreamless sleep of utter weariness. Bertrand shook him roughly.

"Wake, mon ami, wake!" Then Cacalouch slowly opened his sleep-steeped eyes in dull half-comprehension.

"Peste! comrade! Let me sleep."

"Cacalouch! wake! wake!" Cacalouch shook himself, sat up, and rubbed his eyes.

"Listen!"

Then, still half asleep, he would have lain down again had not Bertrand caught him by the arm. Cecile and Maurice were thrilled with fear.

"Listen, Cacalouch!"

Then Cacalouch with a resolute effort pulled himself together and listened.

"Eh!" It was as if some current from the charged atmosphere wrought in him. He sat up, the short hair on his head bristling, his eyes expanding, the skin of his face drawn like a mask.

"It is the dog!"

Then they heard from the distance, borne on the breeze, a short sharp sound, the eager bark of a hound on the trail.

"Quick! We must make for the sea!"

They pushed the boat from the bank and got out the oars, and as they did so the bark sounded again and yet again.

The river, as it emptied into the sea, spread across the sand in a wide shallow estuary. In the centre only was there a sufficient channel to carry them across the sands.

For this channel Cacalouch bade Maurice steer. He and Bertrand took an oar apiece.

As the stream swept them past the mangrove-studded entrance to the river, they caught the first glimpse of the coast-line.

Far away on the crescent of white sand they could see, like black pin-heads, the dog followed by a squad of Canaques. The blood-hound had picked up the trail made by Cacalouch above high water mark from the cocotiers to the boat.

It was a matter of minutes now with the escapés.

As the boat swept from the cover of the mangroves the Canaques saw it, and increased their speed; the dog deserted the trail and stretched his limbs over the harder sand by the water edge, yelping as he came.

Another minute and they would have cleared the bar. They felt the keel grate, then the boat gave a lurch. She was on the sand.

"Lighten her. Out, Maurice, out! Shove her, mon enfant, shove her!" and Cacalouch bending his back put every ounce of a muscular body into his stroke. "Pull, Bertrand, for your life, pull!"

Cecile, as she saw the blood-hound magnified by contrast against the white sand, bearing down on them, with limbs outstretched, uttered a piercing cry.

The cry braced Maurice to his utmost strength. He caught the side of the boat, canted it over

and thus slid her into the narrow limits of the channel.

She slipped from his hands, and before he realised it was three yards distant, three yards nearer the sea!

Cacalouch called to him to run, but he was up to his waist in water, the treacherous quicksand sucking round his feet. Then as the boat drifted to the sea and met the surf, Cacalouch stood up and flung him a stretcher. He caught it, and thus armed, Maurice, with all life compassed in the moment, waited to fight the dog. He could now see the muscular limbs striking on the hard sand. As to the boat it was in the surf, Cacalouch labouring like a giant to wrest it from the shore. Bertrand was stepping the mast, and Cecile made the still air vibrant with her cries.

"Maurice! Maurice!"

In the flash of an eye he saw them. He pictured himself safely in the boat, then realised the truth, and a great sense of loneliness and despair possessed him. This instant realisation of his plight found utterance in a cry that reached the boat with heart-searching poignancy.

"Oh, Cacalouch, you will not leave me? Cacalouch, mon ami! mon ami!"

Bertrand had stepped the mast and pulled the lug sail up. They were getting under way, and for the moment, busied in the detail of their task, it

appeared as if the cry of despair fell on unresponsive ears.

"So, Bertrand, so! Haul in the sheet—no, no! not so much. There! she has the wind! Keep her out from the surf. Go not too far out, then haul down the sail, take to the oars and wait till we come, Maurice and I."

He shipped his oars the moment the breeze, blowing steadily, struck the sail, then gave a few brief directions as to the course they should steer, secured the hatchet in his belt, and almost before they realised it they were alone—Cecile and her father.

Maurice with staring eyes gazed in fascination at the black spots on the sand, the dog so far in advance that he fancied he heard its deep chest breathing. Cacalouch thrust his way with a sweeping side stroke through the surf, now on its crest, now in the foam-flecked hollow. He made for the hard sand between the river mouth and the on-coming pursuers. The surf cast him on the sloping bank down which the draw-back tugged at him. As the suck of the receding water tingled in his ears, his eyes noted the momentary drying-out of patches in the sand. In another second the surf would re-gather force and carry him back in its irresistible arms. He saw no more, for the blood-rush filled his eyes. Straining every muscle to its utmost tension he crawled up the slope and reached the tide line, the surf thundering at his heels. For a moment

he lay on his back exhausted, panting as if his heart would burst; then with a sense of dizziness and nausea sat up and prepared for what was coming. He would not rise till the last moment.

Rapid as had been the course of events, the time that had elapsed was sufficient for the quicksand to draw Maurice further into its grasp. The water now swirled round his chest. He was paralysed with fear. The figure of Cacalouch on the sand came within the fixed range of his vision, but it was momentarily only, for now all his senses were concentrated on the dog. It was about a hundred yards distant.

When it had been far away, there had been a feeling of comfort, of sustainment, in the fact that there was yet a space of time to live before it reached him. As the momentary hope faded, a sense of stillness, of complete exterior isolation filled him. He no longer thought nor felt, but waited.

Cacalouch rose and stood; then changed his mind and knelt. The dog had far outstripped the Canaques, who laboured a full half mile behind. If he could kill the dog quickly he would have time to cut some saplings from the scrub and perhaps reach Maurice.

He knelt on one knee, hatchet in hand, ready for the blood-hound.

The dog, reaching him, slackened his pace, stopped, and with his great chest heaving gazed in

momentary irresolution at the waiting man. He walked crouchingly to the right and left in a semi-circle, his ears close set, his fangs exposed. Then with a bound and a snarl that was half a human scream, he leapt on the waiting man. The force of the impact threw Cacalouch to the ground. He had a vision of death in his eyes as the dog's jaws closed on his left arm. The agony of the man's cry of pain thrilling through the insensate body of Maurice gave it renewed life.

He called to Cacalouch in incoherent words.

Cacalouch clenched his teeth from the pain of the bite, then gripped his hatchet and beat on the head of the dog. The brute let go and the two, dog and man, fought on the sand in a blood-dyed patch. At last Cacalouch rose, torn and bleeding, but with the dog at his feet in the throes of death. He reeled and fell. Once again he fell, but the third time sustained himself. The Canaques were now not far distant. Their shouts filled the air. And Maurice? When Cacalouch turned it was to see that all his effort had been in vain. The quicksand had drawn him down till now only his head remained above water, the boyish head with staring, horror-filled eyes.

Then Cacalouch dropped to the sand again and cursed the day he was born, cursed the devil's island where these things were wrought, and the whole system of creation. As he did so, Maurice with raised arms lashed at the water. Cacalouch

put his hands to his ears to shut out the rest. When he looked again he could see his hair for a moment lifted on the water like a patch of sea-weed. Then he saw no more.

He rose to escape. The Canaques would soon be upon him. With his torn arm, fortunately the bone was unbroken, he would need all the water he could place between him and the native police. The sea-water bit into his wounded arm with the sensation of burning, but it gave him renewed stimulus. Once he was carried back by the surf, then a sweeping wave lifted him out to sea.

Bertrand had executed his orders with precision, and Cacalouch at length reached the boat. So worn was he from exhaustion that Bertrand with difficulty drew him into the boat. The Canaques, gathered round the dead body of the dog, made no attempt to follow.

CHAPTER XVIII

IT is a characteristic of the coral polyp that it must have clear water in which to thrive. The mud brought down by a river destroys it and leaves a break in the continuity of the reef. It was through such an opening that, at the close of day, Cacalouch worked the little craft, and despite the pain of his lacerated arm did not abandon the tiller till night had come, and, the threatened storm passing away in thunder, the moon shone in a cloudless sky.

Beyond the knowledge that to strike the Queensland coast they must, after clearing the island, head their boat almost due west, with but a little northing till one of the many groups of islands was reached—a distance roughly of some six hundred miles—and then continue their course with an acuter inclination northward, Cacalouch had little to guide him. The sun by day, the stars by night, were his compass. In such a venture they had to hazard much. It was determined to divide the twenty-four hours into three watches, to Cecile being assigned the night watch. The highway of traffic lay within the shelter of the Great Barrier reef, and beyond a few island-trading craft and an occasional

ship of the British or French navy, there was little to fear on this outer waste of water. A greater source of danger lay in submerged reefs that showed no indication of their existence beyond the surface wash of the sea. On Cecile had been impressed the instant necessity of rousing her slumbering companions the moment either eye or ear detected the presence of such a danger.

Often through portions of this silent watch Bertrand bore his daughter company, but for the greater part it was for her a period of privacy and seclusion, the men withdrawn to the bow of the boat, leaving her in communion with her thoughts. Though they had a sufficient supply of food they ate but sparingly of the smoke-dried bats' flesh; and as Cacalouch had experienced, cocoanut in any quantity meant an indigestion. The milk of the young nuts, however, made a refreshing drink and conserved their store of water. The second day out the wind changed to the north-east and held steadily from that direction for several days, when it chopped again to the south, only to return to the north later on. The fifth day out they experienced some rough weather. Cacalouch, whose arm was rapidly healing, cleansed probably from the virus of the dog's teeth by its speedy immersion in salt water, held on with the boat close hauled till the weather had abated and the tiller could be safely trusted in the hands of his less-experienced comrades.

They came upon a clump of drifting bamboos, the matted roots supporting the still upstanding canes. It was the only object that for days broke the depressing monotony of their outlook over the waters that compassed them about.

For the first few days, depressed by the death of Maurice, they engaged in little conversation, till Cacalouch the voluble, recovering somewhat, enlivened the hours of the long day with stories of his doings in the past. These being selected passages speedily came to an end. Sometimes in the evening when the staring heat of the sun was replaced by star-lit night, Cecile would sing them a song or Bertrand tell a story. He found, not without amused surprise, that to the brave Cacalouch some of the fairy tales as ancient as the hills had a fresh piquancy, tickling his fancy as keenly as they had done the mental palates of many a generation of children. There were great child-spaces in the mind of the *évadé*, in odd contrast to his big body and record of crime. Nevertheless, for the greater part of the time silence fell between them.

They had been nine days out, making good headway all the time, when Cacalouch at sunrise roused himself and relieved Cecile at the tiller. Wearied out she had thrown herself by her father's side to rest, Bertrand being still asleep. Suddenly she heard Cacalouch exclaim :

"Look yonder, comrades! What see you, Cecile?"

She stood up and, shading her eyes to concentrate their sight beyond the glittering sea space, gazed at the horizon. "There is something beyond there, truly. Like plumes or feathers, eh?"

"Well said, indeed! They are the tops of cocotiers."

A little later they could distinguish a denser mass above which the plumed tops waved in the breeze. Soon the slender shafts of the palms were clearly outlined against the skyline. As they sped nearer they distinguished the surf line against a dark belt of massed vegetation at the base of the palms. Nearer still the dazzling white of the beach came in view. Evidently they were approaching one of the many islands that, as the évadé at the atelier had said, broke their passage to the great reef.

When they were close in to the island Caca-louch skirted its northern extremity and brought the boat to leeward. There they landed on a protected reach of shelving beach, and drew their boat well up under the shelter of an outspreading tree with dark-green glossy boughs inset by sweet smelling flowers, in colour and perfume suggesting the tube-rose. The roots of the tree extended to high water mark, and its dense foliage made a perfect shelter for the boat.

The boat secured, their first thought was of fresh

food. The island was the resort of innumerable noddies, boobies and men-o'-war birds. The sloping bank above the beach was covered with coarse grass and stunted scrub studded with pandanus. The lower limbs of the scrub trees made nesting places for the birds. Cacalouch knocked down two or three nests, despite the protesting mother birds, and securing several fledglings beat a hasty retreat. To Bertrand and Cecile, who were but onlookers, it seemed as if the island were alive with birds, so great was the commotion created by this raid. A deft wring of the neck effectually settled the business of the fledglings, and Cacalouch sat on the grass to pluck them.

"Fat and tender! My faith! we shall have a meal fit for an aristocrat. Bertrand, search you round for a palm leaf and strip it, and you, Cecile, gather wood for the fire. Truly it is well that one has foresight such as comes from a Breton mother, else had we been here with good food and no fire," and he tossed a treasured box of matches to Cecile, the remnant of Bertrand's little stock. "Waste them not, my little comrade; they are as a king's jewels."

The birds, plucked and drawn, were spitted on the midrib of the cocoanut branch, and Cecile's fire, lit with the expenditure of one match, to the approval of the provident Cacalouch, soon blazed up.

"Bertrand, I have an idea—truly it is fortunate for you to be with a man of resource. Here, hold

the birds so that they may be well roasted, turning them thus that they be not a cinder on one side and raw on the other. It is well for a man to know the art of the cuisine, eh?"

"Where are you going, Cacalouch?" inquired Cecile as he made towards the scrub.

"To the bakehouse, my little one, the bakehouse. Come with me! Peste! Bertrand, one had need to watch you as a child. Give that fat fellow more fire—so! Now come, Cecile," and they departed, leaving Bertrand with a deep sense of responsibility cast upon him.

Cacalouch made for a tall cocoanut palm, and with Cecile deeply interested in his movements, searched the vicinity within fall of its nuts. At last with a grunt of satisfaction he went on his knees and commenced to dig up the root of a young palm, releasing the fallen nut through which the radicles had penetrated to the soil. Breaking the nut against the trunk of the mother palm, he exposed a sponge-like mass within.

"There, Cecile! That is bread, my child. Think you not it is like the biscuit de Savoie when you were so high, eh?"

"It is like sponge cake indeed," and she munched a fragment with appreciation. "You are a wonderful man, Cacalouch—you know so many things."

"Non! non! Such observation comes to me as it were by nature. It was with the indigènes I

saw it so used. Now let us return to Bertrand—the smell of the pullets is in my nose,” and he sniffed appreciatively.

Bertrand's efforts to cook the birds to a turn earned the praise of even the fastidious Cacalouch. Cecile, after the long endurance of the vile rousettes, eaten to maintain life, an act of necessity, not of appetite, enjoyed the meal with hearty zest.

Afterwards they built themselves a rude camp for the night. No overhead shelter was needed, but they made luxurious beds of fallen leaves on the grass. Soon after sunset Cecile lay down and fell into deep tranquil sleep. The men sat for an hour later, speaking but little. They had each a fill for his pipe from the carefully economised supply of tobacco Bertrand had brought with him when leaving the concession. They had kept careful count of the days since their departure, and the night of the seventh day had been marked by the indulgence of a smoke. This night's smoke was an exceptional treat. Cacalouch went down to the boat to assure himself of its safety, and returning he and Bertrand sought the sweet refreshment of a long night's rest on land.

At sunrise they were roused by the racket of the birds, with as much noise—Cacalouch declared—as a fourfold devil. Further sleep was out of the question.

Leaving Cecile in camp with the duty of making a fire for breakfast, Bertrand and Cacalouch set

out to capture the meal. They determined to explore the beach for oysters and *écrevisse*. Above the margin of the tide line Cacalouch espied the tracks of turtle, and following them up came to a fine big fellow high and dry on the sand. Cacalouch got between him and the sea, and with the help of Bertrand turned the sprawling amphibian on its back, and killed it. Then they made with success a search in the warm sand for eggs. Cutting some good thick slices from the unfortunate turtle, they returned with the flesh and eggs to camp. With this provender they made a substantial and, the eggs fortunately being fresh, a palatable meal.

So pleased were they with their quarters, so loath to resume the voyage after their long period of cramped captivity, that they resolved to recruit for three days. "Then, my friends," said Cacalouch, "we shall take a course more northward, though indeed I would be better satisfied if I could fix this island by the sketch the little coquin gave me."

The incidents of one day closely resembled those of another, though to Cecile the scrub and the beach with their wonders of plant and marine life were a source of ever-renewed interest. The sagacity—for it was more than instinct—of some of the creatures inhabiting the little island stimulated in her a sense of communal life. They were all units in God's Republic, each seeking to fulfill its destiny. She would sit by the hour watching the robber

crabs, some as large as a full-grown lobster, working their "lay." A robber would climb the tall shaft of a cocoanut palm till he reached the cluster of nuts, then sever one from the stem, and scuttling down to earth secure it. Master robber would then set his muscular claws in the tough cocoa fibre and tear it away, exposing the "monkey face" at the end of the nut. Into the soft plugged holes he would set his claws, and rend the nut asunder, thus reaching the milk white lining of the shell. "Just, my father," Cecile declared to Bertrand—"just as if he had thought it all out—Il sait tout, vraiment!"

"Truly indeed!" interposed Cacalouch, "there must have been one of these rascals, in the beginning of all things, who had such foresight and wisdom as becomes a man of parts. Such a one sat down and thought it out thus. Truly in the beginning of things there must have been wisdom in all creatures. Non! non! Bertrand, talk not to me of your evolution and such stuff. I say in the beginning of things there must have been wisdom in all creatures. Is it not so set out in the Bible? Had not the snake more diplomacy, more cunning, more wit, as it were, than the woman?"

It was on the second day of their resting that Cacalouch, exploring the highest point of the island, came upon what it was conjectured had been portion of a ship's timbers—possibly some wreckage cast on shore and subsequently carried hither. It

was almost completely overgrown by weeds and suckers, but with the help of Bertrand they cleared it and found cut into the face a rude inscription. Bertrand had a sufficient knowledge of written English to decipher the words :

Jno. Williams, A. B.
Whaler "Baltimore," of Boston,
Died at Wreck Id.
1865.

To Cecile, taken to the eminence to see the discovery, it sounded a note of discord. Even into this blissful island Death had found his way. To Cacalouch, however, the finding of the grave with its rude headstone was a piece of excellent fortune.

"That fellow at Ile Nou was no fool. Did he not say if all went well we might strike here-about? Though indeed in this matter I see the hand of God," and he raised his ragged hat. "Now, my friends, if indeed this be Wreck Island and the fellow were not brought here, having died elsewhere, which is a matter beyond comprehension, our course may be set with certainty."

The afternoon was spent in renewing their supply of water and provisions. Water they collected by a primitive but effectual process. Bringing each a large shell from the shore, they went into the central and elevated area of the island and in the soil dug holes. Into these holes water trickled slowly

till enough was collected to fill a cup. Thus cupful by cupful they replenished the boat's keg with good sweet water, not as clear as that from a spring, but clear enough for use.

Along the shore Cecile in her excursions found much strange and beautiful marine life. Its novelty was a source of unending delight to her, and she would bring treasure after treasure to her father and Cacalouch for their inspection.

"Patience! patience, Cecile!" counselled Cacalouch with an air of indifference. "From what I had of the little rascal at the atelier these are but of small worth. Compose yourself, mon enfant. At the great reef itself you shall see such wonders as the Papa Bertrand discovers in his little stories. My faith! if the rascal lied not it is such a sight as will open the eyes all wide. There one finds cockles so vast that if a man were to venture his arm in them and they closed on it, the limb would break. Truly! I had it from the little évadé. It is in all small men," and he stretched himself, "to lie without ceasing; but I have heard like tales from others. There are also lobsters of such immensity that their eyes are like telescopes. Truly! and many other wonders."

On the evening of the third day, towards sunset, with the tide at full, they drew the boat from its shelter under the thick-set tree, and having stowed a supply of cocoanuts and some fledglings they had spitted and smoked, set out on the second

stage of their voyage, a south-east wind filling their sail. Cacalouch, at a rough guess from the information he had obtained from his friend, reckoned that something less than a fortnight would bring them to the Barrier.

The monotony of the second half of the voyage was broken by a glimpse of a steamer on the horizon trailing a long wisp of black smoke against the cloudless sky. They lowered their sail and drifted till she disappeared. When her funnel and masts had sunk below the sky line they set sail again with lighter hearts.

A week out they had to resort to cocoanuts for food, the little stock of fledglings being exhausted, and the remainder of the dried bats' flesh having been jettisoned as unfit for use.

Once more the resourceful Cacalouch came to their aid. On the shore of the island he had picked up, almost buried in the sand, a fragment of copper sheathing, the remnant from some ancient wreck, and by scraping and polishing with shell and sand had converted it into a platter. This and a stock of dry twigs, he had stowed in the boat. From time to time flying fish came aboard, but in the absence of cooking materials and fire, had been restored to the sea. One evening when the sail flapped idly against the mast in a spell of almost complete calm, Cacalouch took his copper platter to the bow of the boat and filled it with twigs.

Bertrand and Cecile watching his movements

with interest, he applied a match to the twigs and they sprang into a long tongued flame that glittered on the black water in points of light.

"My friend," protested Bertrand, "are you lighting a beacon for our capture?"

"Calm yourself, Papa Bertrand. We have taken but little risk hitherto; surely we can afford one chance—or maybe two."

Cecile gave a little cry as the wet body of a flying fish grazed her cheek.

"Sapriste! how they arrive!" exclaimed Caca-louch with the glee of a school-boy as fish after fish glittered for a moment in the flame of the fire, and fell pell-mell into the boat, flipping and fluttering there in great commotion.

"Enough! Enough! Cecile, hand me that fine fellow and that other and the one beyond; and you, Bertrand, those two there, it is all we can cook;" and giving each a smart thwack against the boat he put the still palpitating fish on the embers of the fire, then deftly covered them with the hot ashes. "C'est Dimanche, Bertrand—tobacco night, eh? We shall have some broiled fish for supper."

The supper was excellent—but before they partook of it the humane Cecile restored the surplus fish to their element.

CHAPTER XIX

ON the twelfth day out from the island Cacalouch began to keep a keen watch ahead for any sight of the reef. From time to time they had seen in the distance the Prince of Wales feathers—

for such they resembled—that marked the presence of some little island or group of islands, topped by the waving crests of cocoanut palms.

Tempted though they were to stop at some of these and repeat the experience of their first break they pressed on with increasing impatience to the end of the voyage.

It was on a Wednesday evening according to their count that Cecile, gazing listlessly over the uncompassing ocean, waited to relieve Cacalouch at the tiller. During the afternoon the wind had turned round towards the west, and brought with it a sense of oppression. Warmth lingered in the narrow space between the setting of the sun and the onset of the night.

"Look! look! look! Cacalouch, look! look!" She extended her hand opening up the palms between her closed fingers. "Regardez! un papillon! un papillon!"

"Truly a butterfly! It has been blown from the land, a land wind carries creatures far out to sea. We must be getting close in. Is it not so?"

That night Cacalouch shortened the watch for Cecile. However, he must have a few hours rest, and the land breeze still blowing, little harm could come to them if she kept a sharp look-out.

The moon was at its full that night and the wind light. The girl, tiller in hand, fell into a reverie. The long journey was nearing its close. What had Providence in store for them? Would they surely come to rest and peace at last? She glanced along the boat to the recumbent figure of her father—how much more could he endure? Would the great Father not have pity on them, on this man so wearied, so broken in fortune? As if in answer to her thought she heard the deep-toned note of a voice from the Infinite. It held her for the moment spell-bound. The sound rose and fell with rhythmical precision, the diapason of an eternal voice, the surf breaking on the great reef—boom! boom!

"Cacalouch, éveillez! éveillez!"

Sleeping the light sleep of one on guard, he was awake in a moment; Bertrand also.

"Do you not hear it?"

"It is the reef without doubt. Give me the tiller. Be tranquil. Have no fear; with the wind thus we are safe." He held the boat on her course till, under the moonlight, Cecile saw the long white

line of surf breaking against the reef. It seemed to reach out of space an unbroken girdle of snow-white foam circling the world.

"It is magnificent!" said Bertrand in awe-stricken reverence. "Magnificent!"

Though the roar of the surf with its intermittent pulsations of thunder seethed in her ears, it was so deep-toned that Bertrand's words reached her as acutely as if the night were saturated in silence.

"Magnificent indeed, my father—but more! It is the voice of God Himself speaking to us. Listen!"

Long into the night, the tiller resigned to Cacalouch, Cecile sat gazing at the mystic sight, till lulled by the never-ceasing roar she drifted into sleep.

Cacalouch put the helm up and ran out before the wind till a good mile was placed between them and the reef. He then heaved to till sunrise, when he crept in, running northward and keeping a keen look out for one of the many openings through the barrier.

When Cecile woke the sun was well over the eastern horizon, and though the sense of awe had vanished with the night, the scene disclosed to her eyes was not the less majestic. As far as the eye could reach from north to south the ocean swell rose in a ridge of deep blue water, whose thunder, as it broke on the reef, sang through the air, ting-

ling in their ears with reverberant motion. As the great wave drew back, it exposed the serrated edge of the reef over which the receding water poured into the trough of the sea in a continuous cascade. With re-gathered strength another wave rose like a wall of glass, and shivered itself against the intercepting barrier.

To Cecile's highly strung imagination, a complex thing of interwoven poetry and mysticism, the scene suggested some inarticulate power human in its passion, raging against impediment, and seeking to break it down by strength of resolution. It seemed as if she heard in the thunder of the reef the beating of Thor's hammer or the voice of the mighty Jove, the cry of God in primæval nature.

It was such a scene as brings silence between men, a silence that is its own language. Even Cacalouch, calloused in reverence, torpid in imagination, was moved to silence.

For some time they held on their course northward without indication of a break in the continuity of the reef.

"I have some fear," said Cacalouch, "that we have come too far north. In the south they say there are many breaks of deep water. It was through such a one the little man at the atelier passed. Let us go about and run south, mes amis." So they turned and with the wind still blowing off the land, set the nose of their boat southward.

About noon Bertrand caught the first indication

of a break in the reef. A mile beyond or thereabout the breakers picked up again, and ravelled into the mist of distance, a thin white line.

Cacalouch determined to get within the shelter of the reef before night-fall. To do this they had to beat in through the gap before a head wind. With their lug sail this was a wearisome business, it having to be dipped round the mast as they came about with each short tack. However Cecile, as well as Bertrand, had by this time become well accustomed to the management of the boat, and before evening closed in they passed through the passage; and turning southward came into relatively sheltered waters.

As they skirted the inner edge they saw the ocean swell lifting above the outer in a ridge of water that rose up and up till its attenuated crystalline apex curled, and broke in a seething flood of foam, mottling the wide-spread surface of the reef with patches of crisping snow. With each wave, rippling lines of water traversed the flat expanse chequered by upstanding masses of black-stained coral.

"Yonder blocks are doubtless the 'nigger heads' the little man spoke of, and my faith! they might be the heads of indigènes such as Papa Bertrand speaks of in his fables, gross fellows, prodigious indeed!"

The reef was inset with pale-green pools of shallow water. Its inner margin was not yet fully

exposed; for that they would have to wait till the now rising tide had fallen on the morrow. In an hour or so the pancake-like surface would be covered, and only the black heads of the blocks of dead coral, or the white apices of the tumuli of sand, remain exposed.

Interior to the reef itself they came upon a sandbank that Cacalouch judged would be above high water mark, and there they pulled the boat ashore and rested for the night.

The following morning with the turn of the tide they launched their boat and continued the journey. Instead of beating towards the coast it was resolved to wait till the tide, falling here as much as ten feet, would reach its lowest point and leave the living reef exposed. This was the great sight Cacalouch had promised Cecile, and not even his personal impatience to complete the thirty miles or thereabout that lay between them and the main land, tempted him from allegiance to his promise. Indeed it was enough to look at the girl's eager face, mindful of the promises he had made her of wonders beyond description, to keep him faithful to his word.

At dead low tide he took in the sail and brought the boat abreast of the living reef, a garden of the sea, bizarre, wanton, profligate in colour.

To Cecile, for whom music, colour, form had such an appeal as the sensuous ritual of a religion

has to the emotions, the wondrous beauty spread before her was a revelation of God's Paradise.

"My child," said Bertrand breaking in on the wonder-filled silence of the girl, "I had no thought there were such marvels in the world. Look yonder, *chérie*! Saw you ever such a mass of colour?" He pointed to the clusters of living coral tinted like the heather on a Highland hill-side, dissected by green fungi jewelled with orange-yellow polyps. Against a back-ground of rich browns and deep-toned citrons were tufts of vivid blue, pink, purple, and orange.

Cecile drew a deep breath as if the sense of sight were insufficient to absorb so rare a feast of colour.

"It is fit for a king's banquet beyond there!" broke in Cacalouch. Over the coral table to which he pointed a flesh plant had flung itself, violet, polyp-starred, a truly regal cover.

They sailed past flat-topped masses of coral, their edges fimbriated with millepores and rose-tinted stylaster, in broken spaces the glass-green water making channels and miniature cascades.

"See, comrades! Was I not right? Behold the vast cockles of which I told you!"

The giant clams to which he pointed lay among the coral, their shells fully three feet long from hinge to tip, agape, and in their deep-curved basins a purple bed of living velvet set with golden eyes.

"See, Cecile, is it not a veritable head of Medusa?" The outspread tentacles of the star-fish Bertrand saw were indeed not unlike the serpent-locks of the Gorgon.

"Cacalouch, know you what those fat black monsters are? They are like snakes in the Garden of Eden. Think you not so, Cecile?" And Bertrand gave a shrug of disgust.

"Oh! those fellows there? But truly they are fine ones indeed. They are the *bêche-de-mer*. I have seen many of them. They are good to catch and dry—then you sell them to les Chinois for soup. It is a great delicacy, *ma foi!* But for myself I prefer cabbage soup such as my mother used to prepare, for in all such matters of the table she was greatly skilled."

"But see, my father, is not that most beautiful?" And beautiful it was. In the cup of a great sea anemone, whose poison-filled tentacles floated fairy-like in the water, a tiny scarlet fish found a host and shelter. Immune from hurt it held its home in the bosom of the sea-flower. Looking down through the transparent water to the white underlying sand, they could see great five-armed star-fish of a blue that out-vied the cloudless sky above them. Parrot fish splashed in brilliant colour; other fish coal-black with a blood-red stripe across the back; silver-scaled fish that flashed in the water with the sweep of a polished blade; beauty and marvel everywhere.

As the tide rose it shut out foot by foot the wonders of the living reef. When at last they had vanished, and the voyagers looked again over the mottled surface of the coral field, Bertrand with a deep sigh for a delight that had come and now had vanished from their sight for ever, took his daughter's hand in his and held it close in mutual sympathy. Gazing into her upturned face it seemed to him that the soul of his child was returning to her across great spaces from the Heart of things.

"My little one, what think you of it? Might it not be, Cecile, that the good God, having painted the earth and the sky and so being weary, had here let fall His palette?"

She pressed his hand and laid her face against his arm.

"We have much between us—we two, with the bon Dieu. The beauty of God makes all three one."

CHAPTER XX

PULLING out from the vicinity of the now submerged reef, they again hoisted their sail and made a long tack southward. A haze caused by the warm land wind obscured the coast line. Parallel to the coast they saw numerous high islands and groups of islands. With the wind dead in their teeth, Cacalouch said, it would be hopeless to reach their destination before night-fall. It was therefore resolved to make for the largest island of a group and rest till morning. The following day they would complete the journey. Accordingly they ran their boat on the sand to the leeward of the island they had selected.

Between it and the mainland lay the highway of coastal traffic. Steamers bound North and South for the Queensland ports passed to and fro almost daily. Cacalouch had been warned of the danger, and though the temptation was great to enjoy a cooked meal after so many days of scant and monotonous diet, he resolved not to light a fire lest by it they might attract the attention of a passing vessel.

Against the low but dense scrub that crowned the

island, itself but an accumulated sand bank on a coral base, the wind was completely broken. To secure the boat they fastened it by the kellick rope to a protruding block of coral, the scrub at high tide reaching almost to the water line.

"Eh bien!" remarked Cacalouch as they settled down, thankful for a stretch in the covert of the scrub, "to-morrow we shall land on the coast of this Queensland, where many escapés have succeeded in establishing themselves."

"Truly, friend Cacalouch, but many also have fallen into the hands of the authorities and been extradited."

"Certainly it is so with some, for it is not with all men of spirit that they have the faculty of foresight, of looking all in advance so that they shall not be taken by surprise. It is in such matters that one has the advantage. Have I not brought you safely so far, eh? Then repose in me! Truly I had a dream last night of such a vineyard as words would not describe. I had well-nigh been drowned in a wine-vat when I woke. But let us consider what we, all three, shall do, being landed on this coast."

Cacalouch, with a generous assumption of deference to the opinion of "Papa" Bertrand, called on him for a suggestion.

"Cecile and I cannot be parted. That goes without saying. We must take our fortune together; but as for you, comrade, would it not be well that

you should seek your own safety? We owe you so much, we have no right to burden you further. Let us then separate when we reach this new land."

"May Heaven reward you, brave Cacalouch, for all you have done for us. Had you been indeed a son and brother you could not have done more—truly not more," interposed Cecile earnestly. "Look then, dear friend, to your own safety. It may be that some day we shall again come together when we have been forgotten, when our affair has passed away, when we have made a home for ourselves—but never shall we forget you, Cacalouch, never!"

"As for what little I have done for you and the Papa Bertrand, pouff! Had we but the poor lad Maurice with us, truly it had been well done. Still what little service I have given is it not from the spirit I had of my father, and the laying out of things with due thought and skill that I had from my mother? Let no more be said. Yet I have it in my spirit to make some conquests in this land."

Bertrand moved uneasily. Was all they had come through to be lost by some harebrained venture of the brave Cacalouch? "Some conquests," indeed! when their only course was to hide themselves as speedily as possible in the remote places of this new land.

"The indigènes in these parts are but poor-spirited creatures, I have heard. Such would be good workers in a vineyard with prudent guidance and

the art of diplomacy. The great Christopher Columbus brought many such into subjection."

"But, my good Cacalouch, this is a country already inhabited by the English!"

"Truly I had forgotten it for the moment. These English—they are everywhere. They are like the sauterelles, they eat up everything, my faith!"

It was not without weariness of spirit that Bertrand and Cecile combated the many chimerical schemes of Cacalouch for taking Queensland by storm, and establishing himself in some sort of dictatorship. At length, before lying down to sleep, they came to a definite conclusion; Cecile and her father would take one direction, Cacalouch another—the rest they left to fortune.

When they awoke the following morning the appearance of the island had, with the fallen tide, undergone a transformation. From the little scrub-crowned eminence they looked over what had the appearance of a great pool-broken flat, with occasional boulders scattered at random. Here and there were piles of dead coral, or patches of dazzling sand. Some of the latter were like that on which they stood, so that at full tide their own would be but one of a group.

Crossing the scrub-belt to the western side of the island, they caught their first full sight of the mainland, its high peaks clearly defined in the distance.

Cacalouch, to whom they deferred in all matters touching the navigation of their little craft, reckoned that it would be well past noon before, with the return of the tide, they could set out on the last stage of their journey. The prospect of an end to the long and trying voyage affected them with an almost hysterical restlessness. Cacalouch talked vehemently. His imagination teemed with projects for the future which he recited with characteristic dramatic gestures as he paced to and fro on the sand-girt eminence. It was as if he were a caged bird beating at the bars of his prison. Flushed with the sense of coming liberty, the limitations of the island chafed him. He suggested that, after the rude meal they dignified by the name of *déjeuner*, he and Bertrand should at low tide make "some explorations" across the flat and seek *écrevisse* for their first meal on the shores of the new land. Cecile could rest and remain in charge of the boat.

The men having departed, Cecile, who had been sorely tormented by sandflies during the night, sought refuge in the boat which lay on even keel upon the sand. She made a shelter from the sun with the sail, and lying on the floor of the boat fell to thinking of the long days of the voyage behind them, and the days of uncertainty, of hope and fear, stretching before them. The monotonous break of the sea on the distant reef toned by distance to a restful monotone, sang her to sleep.

When she woke, it was with a sense of oppression that almost reached the point of suffocation. Leaving the boat she climbed to the apex of the island, thinking that perhaps there she would gain a breath of air. The only break in the silence was the dull recurrent boom of the ocean swell on the outer reef. Not a breath of air stirred in the drooping leaves of the scrub trees. The surface of the sea was glassed and formless. The peaks of the coastal range, so clearly defined in the early morning light, were now hid in a dark haze that extended over the horizon like a huge panoply as far as the eye could reach. From the point of vantage to which she had climbed she could see the pool-broken coral reef that linked the members of the group of islands together. Far away in the distance she could also define, or thought she could define, the moving figures of her father and Cacalouch. There seemed to be some strange distortion in her sight. The dark belt of ominous haze that shut out the coast line came closer in even as she looked at it, throwing the immediate foreground into false perspective. The scrub-topped islands stood out in bold relief, their girdles of sand white against the purple-black of the up-coming clouds. The motionless air held in its silent grasp a sense of impending catastrophe. The distant cry of a sea-bird struck clear on the ear.

The tide had turned. Ribands of water spread in slow succession over the coral floor. It was full

time the men returned. Cecile standing on the highest point of the island, waved her arms and called to them.

"Ohé! Ohé! Cacalouch, ohé!" The sound of her voice rang through the silence as if through a void without atmosphere.

A minute passed and the swiftly-moving clouds from the coast swept their mantle over the two moving figures. The sea beyond lay black as ink.

In the scrub that girt the island at her feet she heard the faint rustle of leaves, and a cool breath of air fanned her cheek. A long moaning sound as the wind increased, a splash of ice-cold water on her face, the patter of rain upon the leaves, crisp and sharp like the rattle of spent shot, and she turned for shelter. The storm was upon them. A fork of lightning that for a moment left her sightless ran through the canopy of low-lying cloud. To the South the sea was a charging field of "white horses." Overhead, screaming sea-birds fled before the blast. The wind shrieked and the scrub bent to the ground in its obeisance. The mass of cloud was permeated with a dull rose glow, and ripped from end to end with the cleft shafts of lightning. Then with an appalling roar of thunder it let loose its waters in an avalanche. God help the two out on the reef!

Beaten to the ground with the force of the wind Cecile lay there, a butterfly pinned by the hand of the storm. As the first fierce burst abated, she man-

aged with difficulty to crawl from the exposed eminence to the cover of the scrub, and sat there panting and trembling as the wind lashed the rain through her flimsy garments to the skin. She bethought herself of the boat. The possibility of its escape from the rude moorings added a new terror, and filled her cup of fear to its brim. She must save the boat whatever the personal hazard might be.

Buffeted by the wind, scourged by the rain, she crawled through the scrub to where it had been secured, thanking God in a throb of her heart as she saw it still there. On every other occasion of landing they had dragged it high and dry beyond the tide. Last night that had not been possible. The one occasion, and such an event as this to happen! The tide was already lifting the boat, and it tugged and strained at the restraining rope like some animate thing in captivity seeking freedom. Cecile's first thought was to look at the kellick rope. To her dismay she found that, already, the rope chafing against the coral block had been cut till less than a strand remained entire.

Splashing knee-deep through the water she clambered into the boat. Her intention was to secure a line from the tackle of the sail, and so replace the almost severed kellick rope. The boat was already half-filled with water, the sail and its tackle lay at the bottom a sodden mass. With feverish haste she tried to unloose the wet tackle but it defied her fingers, defied the teeth she brought to their assistance,

and as she struggled with the task the boat, with a final triumphant tug, broke loose.

Almost as she realised the disaster she was a dozen yards from the island. To return in the teeth of the gale was impossible, and the torrential rain was rapidly filling the boat. She set to work with the bailer, a battered tin dish they used for the purpose, to fight for life. Inch by inch the rainfall gained on her; not all the desperate energy she could summon to the task availing against this downpour. Then with an effect of tropical caprice, almost suggestive of stage-craft, the sun through a rift in the clouds cut the veil of rain with a shaft of light. A few seconds later the diffused sunlight filtered through the filmy edges of the storm-cloud, and lit up anew the cleansed face of the world. The rain ceased with a suddenness almost equal to that with which it had come. The black cumulus of cloud passed out to sea with the sound of distant thunder, and palpitated with the motion of a great sea-bird as the lightning lit up the full curve of its breast.

The cool wind, purified by the rain, blew steadily but with abated force. Far away to the South Cecile could still define the tops of the group of islands where they had rested. Never ceasing the task of bailing, she now worked with the stimulus of hope. But whilst she worked the wind drove her further and further Northward till, her task completed, the last vestige of the islands had sunk below the horizon. Still she did not despair. With

infinite toil, the heavy water-sagged sail taxing her strength to the utmost, she at length succeeded in hoisting it, and brought the boat about, at the imminent risk of a capsize; for to handle the tiller and the clumsy lug sail at the same time was impossible. She then endeavoured to beat back to the islands. Concentration on the desperate hope of rescuing her father and Cacalouch, if indeed they had succeeded in reaching the island, blotted out every other thought. She was wet to the skin, and had not eaten food—there was now none to eat—since the early morning meal. It was well into the afternoon—as she knew from the declining sun—but these matters gave her no thought. At every tack she lost much of the ground that had been gained, by having to leave the tiller to re-adjust the sail. Still she never lost hope, her eyes fixed on the distance for a glimpse of the lost islands. The sun went down in an unclouded sky, the clear-cut sphere so distinct and perfect in outline as to suggest that it, too, had shared in the cleansing of the storm. When night dropped its quick curtain over the sea she still sailed on in the light of the star-jewelled sky. Never in after life could she recall the moment when consciousness left her wearied body. The dominant impression was that she sailed on and on in the starlight, beating back with single-souled persistence to the two whose salvation shone before her as a great light in the sky. Over there to the South—there!

CHAPTER XXI

“WHAT do you propose to do, Dubois? Hand her over to the Sergeant, eh?” The Sergeant was mounted police officer Bernard O'Brien, in charge of the Woongarra district, a genial big-framed creature who rode long distances, and suffered many hardships on his official business, with stoic-like philosophy. On rare occasions he brought back with him a prisoner, generally a Chinaman or a Kanaka who, pending the visit of the Police Magistrate, was confined in the local lock-up, secured to the long chain that traversed that little building from end to end.

Dubois, an Anglicised Frenchman who, as “the Madame” his wife, a warm hearted voluble woman, the daughter of a pioneer sugar-grower further South, described it “had sworn alliance to the Queen,” pondered his reply. Henri Dubois, though the close-cropped thatch to his round head had been powdered white for many a year, was still at heart a sentimentalist—that is to say a sentimentalist at discretion, a discretion exercised with due regard for the watchful eye of “the Madame.”

"The poor child is an *escapée*, no doubt, though how a woman could navigate her way from New Caledonia through the reef beats me!" and he glanced at the bow of his boat, where they had made a rude couch for the unconscious girl picked up that morning on the sand bank at the river's mouth, the boat stranded and a hopeless wreck.

"Oh, we'll hear the story no doubt when she comes round—meantime what are we to do with her? It goes against the grain to hand over a girl to the police, a girl like her, too," and Edric cast a youthfully compassionate glance at their companion. "She doesn't look like a—a criminal, Dubois, does she?"

"With women—" began Dubois in view of a wider horizon of experience, his genial face puckering, "with women—" then the sentimentalist prevailed. "No, she does not look a bad woman, *Perivale*."

"I should say the face of a good woman—a very good woman. There's something in her face, Dubois, that one might almost call——"

"Do not say 'saintly,' there's a good fellow. These little saints make me feel so cold. They are like fishes."

"Why fishes?"

"I don't know why, but they are. I would not live with a little fish! No, not for anything. I am not good enough for a little fish, *Perivale*. Not even the sauce tartare would reconcile me to it."

"Nor you to the little fish, Dubois. But what do you propose?"

"I propose not anything—that is, what do you say to leaving it to 'the Madame'?"

"To 'the Madame'?" repeated the younger man dubiously.

"'The Madame' has a great soul; she is not a little fish. Perhaps if she were we might as well hand the girl over to the Sergeant and be done with it."

"But what could the Sergeant do?"

"Nothing that I know of. The poor Sergeant! He would bless us. Better leave it to 'the Madame.'"

"I suppose he would write to Brisbane, and they would enquire and wait. Then perhaps some day they would send her back. Poor little bird, after her flutter in free air—to go back to that vile place."

"Leave it to 'the Madame.' The Sergeant need know nothing about it. 'The Madame' is a superb liar where her heart is concerned—she will invent something. In such a matter I would repose all in 'the Madame.' " He turned aside to adjust the little sail of their light craft as it skimmed over the surface of the river.

"Then we shall not call at the township?"

"No, keep close in shore near the bend, and we will land her at the plantation."

"I wish she would rouse a bit. She looks almost

like a corpse lying there so still. I suppose it's all right, eh?"

"It is only exhaustion. The poor girl must have had a terrible time. She is as thin as a lath; but 'the Madame' will make that all right."

"Dubois, your faith in 'the Madame' beats the devotion of an early Christian. There's something in matrimony after all!"

"Eh well! if you survive it," grinned Dubois, "it is all right—at least that is with such a one as 'the Madame.'"

In the distance they could already see the township. It stood on a tongue of land, the point of junction between two branches of the river. The sheet of water spreading out before it resembled a lake enclosed by high verdure-covered banks, crested by walls of waving cane. Along the river-bank were here and there clusters of Chinamen's huts, from which, in the closing day, spirals of smoke rose straight into the air, an index of its purity.

The plantation of "Mon Repos" extended along the Southern arm of the river for some miles. The river-bank of richly-coloured loam was a hot-bed of vegetation, the succulent leaves of the sweet potato, clothing it with a sap-green coverlet spangled with blue flowers. Some distance back stood the planter's home, sheltered on one side by a great clump of bamboos, their feather tips knotted with sprays of leaves, the long articulated canes creaking in the breeze. The house, a square roomy bungalow, was

nested in masses of blossoms depending from creepers that twined the posts of the deep verandah, or tangled themselves in its lattice work. On a Northern exposure a magenta-tinted mass of bougainvillia enclosed the whole side, and clambered to the roof, a glowing sheet of unbroken colour. In this sun-tempered verandah, spattered with the gold dust of minute broken lights, hammocks and capacious deck chairs invited one to rest. Looking Westward through the open spaces between trees and palms, one caught a glimpse of the river where, at low tide, a bank of white sand, midway between the nearer and the further bank, glittered in the sunlight. From the house a broad pathway, whose deep reds complemented the greens of the grass and foliage on its margin, led to the river bank, down which a series of rudely-built terraces and stepways led to the little jetty where the boats were tied.

Dubois brought the skiff to the jetty with the skill of one used to the handling of a boat. Then he sent Perivale to the house for "the Madame."

"The Madame's" appearance at the top of the bank dispelled all sense of romance in the scene. She was a woman in whom mother Nature might be said to have run riot, prodigal in adipose tissue from her round face with its double chin to the suggestion of overlapping folds above the uppers of her stout-laced boots. Her print dress, the original pattern of which had been merged into a universal dingy blue, conveyed a fascinating sense of the

heroic to one gazing on "the Madame" for the first time. One speculated with transfixed eye on the possibilities of further tension on the full curved line of strained button holes that held the magnificent torso in restraint. Her headgear consisted of a straw hat swathed by a pugaree of Indian silk. As she waddled down the steps, Dubois murmured in his native tongue, "*Elle est magnifique, vraiment!*"

With a profusion of gesture, and a volubility of language that effectually silenced his companion, he proceeded to explain how he and Perivale had found the girl on the sand bar at the river's mouth.

"Sherry!" remarked Madame drily, when temporary exhaustion had brought a lull in Dubois' narration, "Sherry, if you could find a fortune as easily as you find a girl you'd be a rich man. It's like enough if there's a lost girl about, you'd be the man to find 'er."

"Sherry" was Madame's corruption of "Chéri." It had been said, not without some truth, having regard to poor Dubois' depressed fortune before he found a place of refuge with "the Madame," that he in turn might well have dubbed her "Port." However, Port and Sherry were a very happy couple.

They lifted Cecile out of the boat and laid her gently at "the Madame's" feet.

"Poor lamb!" said she.

"Perivale wanted to hand her over to the police!"

"I!" protested the young man indignantly. "Madame, I swear to you I never thought of such a thing. It was——"

"I suggested we should bring her to you, my angel. 'The police!' I said, 'the police! 'The Madame' would never allow it.' Am I not right?"

"Why the police, Sherry?"

"She is without doubt an escapée from New Caledonia."

"She don't look very wicked, Sherry—the poor lamb, perhaps dying while you two gawks of men do nothing. What she wants is fermentations and a pack. When she's quite well again, Sherry, I'll think over what we'll do. Mr. Perivale, give me a 'and up the steps, and then you go back and 'elp Dubois to carry 'er to the 'ouse."

"The Madame" had but one course of treatment for all physical troubles, fomentations, or as she expressed it "fermentations" and a pack. The patient subjected to the pack was relieved of all clothing, then swathed in a cotton sheet wrung out after immersion in water; over this was placed a thin blanket, and finally an oil-skin. This induced a delightful languor; and the patient usually fell into a deep sleep, to wake with a sense of refreshment. The "fermentations" were a purely local treatment preceding the pack.

Probably in this case, though by hazard, the

treatment could not have been bettered. But though the pack was repeatedly applied, it was not for some days that Cecile fully regained consciousness. Even then she was in such a condition of weakness that she lay inert on her bed as if still hovering between life and death.

Cecile knew no English beyond the little she had learned in her school days, a vocabulary insufficient for any practical use. "The Madame" on her part knew but a few odd phrases of French she had picked up from "Sherry," whose own French, for he had been born and bred on a West Indian plantation whence he had emigrated to Northern Queensland, was not of the purest.

When therefore Cecile, after many days, came to herself, the services of Dubois had to be enlisted. In reply to her enquiries he explained how they, he and Perivale, had found her. She questioned him eagerly as to the fate of her companions, explaining that one was her father, the other the brave Cacalouch to whom they owed so much. Had anything been heard of them? Dubois knew nothing, had heard nothing, but promised he would make enquiry at Brisbane. It was possible they had been picked up by some passing vessel. "What then?" she asked. "Why then they would probably be deported to the island prison to be dealt with by the French authorities." She buried her head in the pillow, and Madame at this dismissed the perturbed Dubois with indignation, deeming him to be the

cause of "the poor lamb's" trouble, and sat by the bedside stroking the girl's long black hair.

Dubois, faithful to his promise, made diligent enquiry through friends in Brisbane, wrote also to Cooktown, and made searches through the files of Queensland newspapers, but without result. He stopped short, however, of probing the matter to official sources, fearful lest he might compromise the girl herself, for whom "the Madame" had conceived out of her motherly heart an instant affection, an affection into the warmth of which no child of her own had come.

Day after day Cecile questioned him, and with each renewed promise of further enquiry lit her little lamp of hope anew, each evening to be quenched at sight of Dubois' face. "Nothing, nothing, my friend. I see it in your face." At length Dubois came to the end of his resources.

"Then he is dead, my dear father," and she reproached herself with bitter words, she to whom no reproach was due.

The depth of the girl's grief greatly distressed Madame, who was tongue-tied in her efforts at consolation. She relieved the pressure on her emotions by heaping undeserved contumely on the head of the hapless Dubois. It was he who was the source of the poor child's anguish. When he endeavoured to explain, she accused him of brutality, and declared Heaven had made all men as clumsy with their tongues as with their legs, and was ever

such a clumsy creature in company as a man and his legs! Thus, trailing into irrelevancy, she left "Sherry" indignant but hopelessly worsted.

It was possible, Cecile thought, that her father and Cacalouch had been rescued and returned without official intervention to the prison. As a last resource she addressed a letter to Doctor Thibauld; but though for months subsequently she waited anxiously the incoming of each mail to bring her news, none came.

Her mental trouble necessarily retarded full recovery. Still she was young, and for trouble in youth, however deeply seated, there is the balm of time, the healing of wounds in the vigour of living. The mother-like attitude of "the Madame," to Cecile, who could not recall a mother's tendance, roused in her the emotions of a filial affection. In these days of trouble a deep-set love was rooted, out of which sprang later the growth of such close confidence as exists between a mother and her daughter.

"The Madame" was impatient that Cecile should learn English, and Dubois, when he came from the mill or the fields in the evening, was carried off to Cecile's room there to begin the lessons. Dubois' methods as a teacher were those of nature. As a grammarian he was nowhere, but as a teacher he was an undoubted success. He would touch this piece of furniture and that, repeating its name in English; then he would supply a few verbs, and in

the course of an hour add to his labours of the day not a little in the exertion of lifting this article, and replacing that. Before she left her room there were but few articles in it for which she did not know the equivalent English word. When later on she spent long happy hours in the cool recesses of the verandah, "the Madame," who had quickly picked up her husband's method, took up the course of instruction. This, however, was subsequently the cause of some confusion to Cecile, whose use of the English aspirate was to the end of her days but ill-defined. "'Orses," Madame would say, pointing to the horses as they passed on the way to the mill with their dray-loads of cane. "'Ot," said Madame as she wiped the perspiration from her round face, coming in from the outer glare of sunlight, and "'Ot," repeated Cecile, dutifully.

One day Perivale, who had been most sedulous in his enquiries concerning her progress in health, came to the plantation and was delighted to find her on the verandah.

"Mister Perivale," said Madame.

Cecile held out her hand and looked frankly in his face. What a fine young man, she thought, how tall, how gallant! He could do many things surely, he looked so clever and so kind. There was in his eyes too so much of kindness.

"It is ver' 'ot day, Meester Per'vale."

"Very hot indeed, Miss Cecile." This was the

conventional beginning of their acquaintance. Soon Perivale also took up the rôle of tutor, and thereafter business brought him many times to the plantation.

To the young man there is fascination in the touch of sadness in a woman's eyes. It gives him, he thinks, a glance into a soul that needs a solace which he, delighted egoist, could best supply.

Perivale lived up the other branch of the river, where he and two partners had a saw-mill. They had taken up a large tract of heavily-timbered land along the river bank, and were clearing it with the ultimate view of establishing a plantation. To him had been assigned the more commercial side of the joint enterprise. Now the measuring of timber and the working out of quantities requires at least concentration of thought, and Edric Perivale, after the first interview with Cecile on the verandah, found the dark eyes with the touch of sorrow in them frequently intruding on his day's work. Logs of cedar, hardwood, beech and orangewood were seen in odd and mystic conjunction with a pair of eyes that looked into his with mute appeal, the call of youth to youth, sex to sex.

What a day of wondrous delight it was when he brought the little steam launch, that puffed with prodigious fuss through the quiet waters of the river, to the jetty at the plantation, and Cecile, with "the Madame" and Dubois, paid a visit to the saw-mill! The white dress, the broad brimmed

Panama hat, accentuated the delicate old-ivory tint of her ovalled face, the density of her black massed hair. There was a new light in her eyes, a sparkle of excitement that set back the sombre suggestion of a hidden pain. Her broken English, her quick vivacious movements, never lacking grace, set Edric's heart to a quicker beat than was its wont. Then there was the delightful familiarity that approached the camaraderie of closely knit families. "The Madame" was, in sort, a mother of all youth on the river. All laughed with her, none of them all, had he thus dared, laughed at her. She was "the Madame," sans culture, lacking in education, primitive in tastes but great of heart, bountiful in cheery words, and extravagant in hospitality. She would never be rich, would "the Madame," but she was of such as Heaven endows with the gift of never realising poverty.

To Cecile the day was one of marvels. She saw the circular saw, a whirling, dazzling disc, and heard its high note of challenge, as the big logs came sliding up to it, change into a deeper note of power that cried defiance as it caught the wood, and ripped it with flying sawdust into a score of planks. There was a woodland incense all around her, the perfume of the sawdust growing by yellow and tawny-tinted mounds into an ever increasing mountain.

When all the wonders of the mill had been exhausted, the launch took them higher up the river

into primæval places, where the banks were a wild luxuriant tangle of tree, shrub and creeper, long supple-jacks and lawyer vines lacing and interlacing the limbs of trees, masses of wild convolvulus looping from branch to branch and trailing blossom-knotted ends in the water. They landed at a break in the bank where a drifted snag had massed the sand till it formed a little promontory, partially grassed. There "the Madame" spread a table cloth, and laid out the picnic under the shade of a tree over-spreading the bank above. Madame, Dubois and Cecile—the man in charge of the launch did not count except so far as he was necessary to boil the water for their tea—made all Perivale's little world of that one day.

They had a more conventional meal in his own quarters at the mill later in the afternoon, and at night, with the yellow moon rising over the feather-topped cane fields of Mon Repos, they reached the jetty and went up the bank to the home. There they sat on the verandah, the evening air crepulant with the sound of insects, the moonlight glittering through the trees on the broken spaces of the river.

CHAPTER XXII

THE Madame's" originally expressed intention of determining what should be done with Cecile when she had recovered, never crystallised into any formulated plan. The girl imperceptibly wrought herself into the fabric of the family. Madame Dubois would as soon have thought of handing over Dubois himself to the authorities for his many minor offences, as of parting with her newly found daughter, for such was the implied relationship established between them. Her rapid progress in English was a daily delight to the good woman, for now the long spaces between the coming and going of Monsieur her husband were filled, as women love them to be filled, with the cheerful clatter of tongues. "The Madame" found a new interest in surroundings that by familiarity had grown commonplace. To the unaccustomed eyes of Cecile the plantation was full of interests. Accompanied by "the Madame," whose bulk never seriously interfered with her activity of limb, Cecile made a round of the place till every feature became an essential part of her new home. The great mill with its whirl of activities fascinated her, the

"Marys" working in the fields, their brightly-tinted or spotted dresses and turbaned head-gear of saffron yellow or turkey red, the roly-poly piccaninies with their bright-beaded eyes glancing from the folds of a shawl over the mother's shoulder as she hoed down the row, had a human interest for Cecile that filled the days of her plantation life with delight. She would sit with a group of the copper-coloured island women and husk the cobs of corn—for here and there rows of maize had been planted between the cane—till her fingers tingled with pain. She would even plunge into the tall cane brake where the "boys" sweated at the exertion of cutting, and try herself to wield the heavy cane knife. As she said to "the Madame," who had little sympathy with such pranks, she wanted to know how it felt to do things. There was within her an impulse for realisation, for touching the actual, which she could not resist.

As English became familiar to her, she loved, too, the times of rest at "the Madame's" side listening to the older woman's quaint narrations and crude philosophies. The human sympathies of the two brought them together. Cecile would wonder what it must feel like to be as these coloured people were. "Much the same as you and me, my dear. It's the sun paints the skin, but God makes the inside," "the Madame" would reply, and it was "the inside" of things that Cecile sought. Indeed, she asked so many puzzling questions that "the

Madame" found occasion to rebuke her "cleverness." To Madame cleverness was not a desirable attribute of women. "Most women want to marry, and it don't do to be too clever when you're out after a 'usband," she remarked, "leastways not to show it. Men don't like clever women, my dear. They like to tell a woman two and two makes four, and a real clever woman pretends she's s'prised at it. It takes more cleverness than a woman ought to let on, just to make a man feel comfortable with her. Men are poor creatures in a lump, but it don't do to let them know it till you're married. Why there's Sherry, to see 'im trying to think is like looking at a 'en on a crockery egg. He just sits and sits and don't 'atch nothing. What I do like in a man is chippiness. Chippiness is a real good thing in a 'ouse. That's what I like in Sherry. He's always so lively about nothing. When God made 'im, it must 'ave been a fine day. You mark my words, Cecile, don't marry a man for 'is cleverness, for none of them are real clever. First see if 'e's chippy and take 'im if 'e is. My folk were dead against me marrying Dubois. They said 'e was a strange taste for a widow, but why a widow shouldn't 'ave a bit of liveliness for her second I don't know!"

Once a week "the Madame" sent for a supply of fish to the fishermen's camp at the river's mouth. This duty frequently fell to Dubois, who was on occasion joined by Edric Perivale. It was a mark of

signal confidence in the former when Madame one day suggested that this little boat trip would make a pleasant break for Cecile. Thenceforward Edric was an unfailing companion of the older man and Cecile on commissariat duty. The opportunities afforded by these trips, supplemented as they were by increasingly frequent visits from Edric to "Mon Repos," fed an inarticulate passion which drew the two almost insensibly into the charmed circle of lovers' dreams. The vivacity of Cecile's nature, held so long in restraint by the conditions of her life, seemed now to sparkle with intensified force in the happy environment of her new home. Not that the unhappy past was ever wholly blotted out of her thoughts, the love for her lost father one whit diminished, but time softened the asperities of the retrospect and cast a grey veil over it that, taking away something of truth, replaced it by memories that seemed half a vision, pathetic yet cherished.

To Edric she was a creature of the sun—sun-born. The svelte figure graceful, mobile, answering with innate sympathetic movement to a flow of words that held here and there a quaint idiomatic suggestion, would have stirred the blood and challenged the pursuit of men less responsive than this young Englishman in voluntary, but not the less irksome exile from women of his class. She on her part found in the self-contained nature of the man a suggestion of strength that drew her towards him

with the subtle attraction of opposites—nature's impulsion to a completed life.

In the early stages of their dawning love, the social factor, "What am I in the world? What are you?" had no place. It was later on, when the full recognition of their attitude to each other was realised, that it came to them in the strength of its worldly significance. For the present they drifted on the stream without a thought of past or future, happy in the luxury of physical life, the tropic warmth of the sun, the lush luxuriance of nature, the cloudless sky by day, the wonder of the love-fraught moonlit night. They met with ill-concealed eagerness, and parted with hands lingering in their clasp.

"The Madame's" share of the post was never great, merely an odd letter here and there. However, their receipt was made the most of. She would not read her letter before the evening meal, but laid it aside as a little luxury to be taken when the soothing effect of the good digestion that invariably waited on her appetite brought the mood for a full enjoyment of her correspondence. Then she would put on her spectacles, draw her chair near the shaded light of the oil lamp, smooth out the pages of the letter on her lap and read—with punctuations of abbreviated items for the entertainment of Cecile and Dubois.

"Well, I never!" said she one night, a tone of chagrin in her voice that caused her auditors to

raise their eyes from work and book. "Well, I never! if the Bishop ain't going to disappoint us after all. Can't come, he says."

"What's the matter?" queried Dubois.

"Got a 'itch in 'is arrangements! Poor man!"

"A what?"

"'Itch in 'is arrangements. Ain't that plain?"

Cecile looked puzzled and turned to Dubois.

"Comment?"

"Oh! ask the Madame. I don't know," said Sherry hastily, resuming his work on the plantation accounts.

"How was it, Madame?" she questioned.

"All 'is arrangements are turned upside down, my dear, and I was to be confirmed, too."

"This 'confirmed'—what is it?"

"It is the confirmation in the church."

"Oh! I understand; it is with us, too, but very little children when we are so confirmed. Not like that with you, eh?"

"My dear, we were all too busy for confirmations in my time. You might count yourself lucky if you got baptised. The Bishop said when 'e was round 'ere last that I must do it. Though what sense there is in saying, 'What is your name, N. or M?,' when it isn't either, I never could understand. But the Bishop says it's the proper thing, and it don't do to take risks about getting into 'eaven, does it?"

"No truly, not at all," assented Cecile demurely.

"This Beeshop, he is Edrique's—Mr. Perivale's father, is it not thus? He is a great man, eh?"

"Oh, yes! a tiptopper."

"What is this 'teep-topper?'"

"Très distingué," interposed Dubois.

"My dear, you call him 'My Lord,' and 'e wears a surplus with ruchings all round the wrists, and looks 'eavenly when 'e's got them on."

"He is a ver' good man—ver' good?"

"Oh dear me yes, very good; why, my child, that's what 'e's paid for. If 'e wasn't good 'e'd 'ave 'is surplus took off in no time. Yes the Bishop's a good man all right, but somehow 'e don't seem quite 'appy. 'Appy is as 'appy does, and 'e ought to be 'appy but 'e don't look it. Then some folk are like that. Like taking goodness in pickles, though for myself, Cecile, I like it in jam. Then 'is voice is melongollic—like no other voice I know of—a proper voice, I suppose. I don't like it though. Now there's the Methodies; they talk to God in the voice God gave them and lots of it, but the Bishop 'e talks to God in a special sort of voice. 'E's bad, but some of the curics is worse. They're more particular, too, than the Bishop about saying prayers in their clothes. Once there was a curic up 'ere for 'is 'ealth, and a gohanna eat up 'is surplus off the clothes line, and 'e couldn't say 'is prayers nohow. But I like the Bishop; 'e ain't always chucking stones at the sinners like them curics. The younger they are, my dear, the more they chuck

stones. Not that I'm standing up for the sinners, as Sherry knows full well; but I like fair play, and they don't get it from the curics."

So it happened that the Bishop of Capricornia, whose appointment to the See had been the result of such natural selection as comes from the moving of high personages in high spiritual places at the persistent goading of a faithful wife, put off his visit to the river. With his sister at the Episcopal Palace—a modest brick house on a few acres of ground—he remained in blissful ignorance of his son's adventure as a pilgrim of love.

To Edric the news of his father's change of plan came with a sense of relief for which he felt a vaguely defined compunction, as if to feel thus relieved were something lacking in loyalty to the dear old pater, whose life was so completely wrapped up in his own. Edric was the only child his wife had borne the Bishop.

"The Madame" with the innate sense of delicacy which is not the necessary product of polite deportment but the attribute of a generously sympathetic nature, had refrained from questioning Cecile as to that life which lay behind the day when she had been brought unconscious to "Mon Repos." She would leave it to the girl. Doubtless the time would come when, out of her love for the motherly soul who had taken her with instant protection, unhesitating trust, to her heart, she would unfold the manuscript of the past. In the meantime "the

Madame" resolutely put all doubts behind her. It was not possible that such a clean-souled, frank, impulsive nature could be set against a background of crime. Whatever it was that lay hidden from her sight, Madame refused to believe it to be evil. She was not sufficiently skilled in self-analysis to recognise that the need for trust, the call upon a blind belief in the girl's unspotted record was, in itself, the evidence of an underlying doubt—the thing she would not face, the bogie in the dark.

To Edric the same question had presented itself—what lay behind the seemingly guileless life of Cecile, what sinister things were hidden in the secrecy of her thoughts? To his nature it was not possible to play the mental game of self-deception that sufficed for "the Madame's" needs. Of an evening, the day's work at an end, he would—somewhat moodily they thought—withdraw himself from his companions, and with his pipe for company wander down the track to the township without definite aim, returning often without actually reaching it. He passed through a season of indecision, of mental struggle that affected him—thus it seemed—as if he were living in a pent, unwholesome atmosphere. There were nights when he would return home wearied after miles of aimless wandering, and lay his head on the pillow with a complete sense of rest—he had come to a decision, there would be no more tossing to and fro; he would go on with his work and put Cecile out of

his thoughts. He would wake from a dream of her, all the resolution of the night before vanished as if with its darkness. Then for evening after evening he would pull the skiff down to "Mon Repos," and return as one who moves between earth and heaven, his eyes filled with the picture of her face, his ears with the music of her voice, the desire of possession thrilling every nerve. Later he would absent himself, it might be for days, or even a week, fighting back, trying to re-establish his self-mastery. He would argue the matter with himself, putting the rational case as a lawyer might the contents of his brief—this nameless girl coming from an island of crime, doubtless herself a criminal, alien in race and religion, alien to all that a man, placed as he was, might demand. It was to sacrifice his life, to ruin every aspiration—perhaps to kill his father. And as he put it thus, and called himself base and imbecile, her face floated between him and the grave rational self who reasoned thus wisely, the sweet sorrow-hinting eyes looked into his and the little hand nestled closely in his palm. Then for a space all reason, all calm outlook on the future went to the winds. He saw no further than the face of the woman whose being possessed him. There were nights when he left "Mon Repos" as a god treading the clouds; the stars shone as never stars shone before; the inert air laden with distilled perfume from tropic blossoms intoxicated every

sense. Dear God! how good a thing it was to live, to have youth, to love!

His son Edric had caused the Bishop many an hour of disquiet. In his youth he had shown indications of a headstrong character, impatient of control. The student habit to which he had perforce to conform chafed him; in monetary matters he was somewhat reckless, the recklessness of a careless undisciplined nature rather than that of a man loving ostentation. The father saw little prospect of a career before his son in one of the plodding neutral-tinted professions for which collegiate life would fit him. He admitted to himself that Edric was essentially an out-of-door animal, impatient of the kennel. And in the secret recesses of the Bishop's heart, the lad's revolt against conventional restraints found a sympathetic echo. He himself had felt the lust of life in his blood, the priest and the man at war, but the priest, with the forces of convention at his back, had in the end conquered, and the years lay behind him grey with the monotony of subjugated desire. Then came the unforgettable chapter in his life, his breakdown in health, his wife Isobel's concern about it, ignorant as she was of its cause, and finally the resolve to quit England. To the efforts of the indefatigable Isobel, who for months led her unfortunate uncle, the Dean, a life of painful stimulus to do something for "dear Frank," he owed his appointment to the remote See of Capricornia.

Despite the restlessness that possessed him, the feverish desire for distractions from the torments of his conscience that made the inertia of his life at Trescott a daily torment, the Bishop would have hesitated at the banishment from the old land had it not been for the prospect it opened up for his son Edric. It meant the cutting short of the latter's academic course, but as a pass degree was all he aspired to, the loss in that respect was not momentous. The wife to whose unflagging energy the Bishop owed his translation, fell an early victim to climatic conditions whose force she resolutely declined to admit. In the struggle to bring tropical nature into subjection to English conditions, she succumbed some eighteen months after the family's arrival in Queensland. Thenceforward Miss Betty, who had accompanied her brother to his new home, assumed the management of his household.

Under his mother's will, for she owned some property in his own right, Edric became a small capitalist. The new life, with its outlets for energy and the assertion of individual will, had an attraction for him that the more sober callings of the older world lacked. He joined his fortunes to those of two other young men who, born in the new land and trained in its life, had the practical experience of its conditions he himself did not possess.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE Madame" noted the growth of attraction between her adopted daughter and the Bishop's son without alarm, indeed with sympathy. Born and bred in a social atmosphere in which democratic ideas met no impediment of fixed status, there was no outrage against the conventions of her conception of society, if she had any, in a union between this unknown girl and Edric. That the woman should make a good wife, the man a faithful self-dependent husband, met all the requirements of Madame's code. She had in her own youth under humble conditions enjoyed to the full the trustful freedom the new world has granted to be the charter of its womanhood. Espionage, chaperonage, were unknown to her in words or sense. In Madame's eyes, a girl's innate self-respect was the best guardian of her character. It followed that Cecile and Edric were given a degree of liberty the mere contemplation of which would have set the excellent Isobel, deceased, in a paroxysm of apprehension.

Cecile's own training in early life had been unconventional, with more of the masculine sense

of personal liberty in it than fell to the lot of the average French demoiselle. The narrow life of the brief period she had spent at the Mission house of the Sisters in the island had impressed her with a sense of unnatural constraint and artificiality. After-events had but thrown her back with intensification on her original outlook upon life. The added knowledge of the world's evil things had strengthened, not unnerved, her character. She went and came with Edric through the plantation, or boating down the long stretches of the river, with an absence of restraint. She trusted him frankly, but with a trust that was the outcome not of any ignorance of life but of the sense of her own self-reliance, of belief that the ultimate issue to a woman lay with herself.

Thus they drifted into the relationship of lovers by a current as natural as the incoming tide of the river washing the banks of "Mon Repos." The early stages of their affection, an affection as yet undefined by expressed words, were curiously complementary. The girl's strongly-marked spirituality of character, her sensuous delight in colour, form, harmonious sound, her susceptibility to natural phenomena, playing on her as if she were some finely-attuned instrument answering to an occult hand, developed by sympathy a new world to Edric. She gave eyes to the man's soul, eyes that saw the beauty spread so lavishly about them with a new significance, a revelation. Under its influence he realised

something of the philosophy of the Neo-Platonists; for at odd times, when their boat sailed lazily down the river at the close of day, there came spaces of a great peace to him, as if indeed his soul escaped from its habitation to dwell in the universal soul of nature.

And if she thus woke the dormant senses of the man to a world of beauty and of spiritual tranquillity, he, on his part, brought to her a new delight in the activities of life, its physical energies, its light of intellectual reasoning. This play of complementary forces manifested itself in the creation of a ground of mutual interests, in the delight of an interchange of thoughts as they came within the range of widely differing temperaments. The mental exaltation each thus excited in the other, now by a call on the purely sensuous side, then by a quick apprehension of some unknown fact, some bit of acquired knowledge, fed the underlying attraction of each to each. The day of declared love was not far distant, could not be far where youth, romance, and natural attraction had such free play.

The struggle to compel himself, to put chains upon desire, to take counsel of that bloodless oracle Mr. Worldly-wise, had been abandoned by Edric after a futile effort. He floated down the stream, with love a blind mariner at the helm.

One afternoon when the close of the winter season, if that could be called a winter season where sunlight filled almost every day-lit hour, was quick-

ening into short-lived spring, they sailed their boat up the branch of the river past the saw-mill, further than they had yet gone in all their outings; so far indeed, that at last the sail no longer served them, and they had to take to oars.

They passed beyond all sight of habitation. Between the narrowed banks of the upper reaches of the river the stream flowed so sluggishly that every leaf of foliage arching its surface was reflected with fidelity. The unreal blended so magically into the real that the boat, moving lazily through the water with scarcely a ripple in its wake, seemed poised in a bower of greenery. From overhanging trees dropped trailing vines, that, daintily touching the placid surface of the water, made faint expansive rings. Dragon-flies with outspread gauzy wings hung motionless in the warm scented air. White blossomed clematis knotted the swaying vines that were looped from tree to tree; the river banks were blue with masses of convolvulus. In a nest of dark green a wild raspberry bush caught a glint of filtered sunlight on a spray of ripened fruit that glowed amidst the cool shadows like an exquisite jewel.

From the deeper water the boat passed into the shallows, floating through a bed of flat-leaved water weeds and spiculated purple lilies, till the keel grated against the sand banks splashed with shimmering light. They marked the farthest point of navigation. The two rested on their oars and

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watched the fish flash out of shadow across the open spaces of shallow water, fancifully likening them to silver arrows shot by the water nymphs who guarded the sources of the stream. Miniature fleets of pink-tinted and cupular petals floated past them, falling through the quiescent air from blossom-laden trees whose intercepting leafage broke the sunlight into golden tesseræ.

The excuse for the outing—the poorest shred of an excuse was all sufficient—had been to gather fern roots from the virgin bush at the river's head, a terrace of waterfalls whose distant music broke the stillness of the air. Securing the boat they started on their quest, Edric cutting a way through the screen of tangled leaves and tendrils. The pent-in air of the scrub was close and damp, pregnant with the odour of decaying vegetation. It suggested death, but in truth breathed life. From the red-brown mould that still held, in a semblance that almost a touch destroyed, the form of fallen trees, sprang ferns of exquisitely delicate green, creatures of a woodland twilight, untouched by glances of the sun. The withered branch, the fallen trees were clothed with dainty garments of lycopod, moss and fern. Here and there the density of the scrub was broken where time or storm had made its inroad. In one such break the sunlight found an opening, and gilded the head of a tall up-springing palm. The stem rose straight and clean till challenged by a parasite fern resenting the individual

life where all lived on all. Its young shoots made an amulet of green round the neutral tinted shaft, and above it, the long sweeping branches of the palm fell like an emerald fountain.

Here they rested, glad of the breath of outer air that penetrated to the spot, welcoming the break of sunlight after the dim recesses through which they had come.

Panting with the exertion of their struggle against the close-set forces of the scrub, they sat on the fallen trunk of a tree, a mass of white jasmine-like flowers trailing the branches that had at one time crowned its head.

"This bush, it is so thick as the bush at Foa!"

"Foa?" he repeated interrogatively.

"Have you not heard of Foa? It is in the island where we lived—my father and me—no I—yes me, altogether we two."

He shook his head. "You have never said anything about it, Cecile—and—well of course we did not ask you."

"Truly! You were ver' good, ah! so good. You take it all so much—eh, what you call him, mon ami? Ce chère Madame she says he is all dead—what is he?"

"Trust! poor trust is dead. But that's all nonsense, Cecile. We trusted you—we trust you still."

"That is a good thing, Edrique, to so much trust a girl all strange to you. The Madame has the ver' big heart, eh?"

"She has, indeed."

"She has nevaire ask me the one word, not the one word. She take me all upon the poor trust, what is dead."

"No! no! Cecile, not dead——"

"The trust what is not dead. Why you not ask, Edrique, eh?"

"The Madame,' Dubois and I simply trust you, Cecile. We did not ask you because we wanted you to understand that we did trust you—fully. Some day when you think it right you may tell us."

"You wonder why so long I not say something, eh?"

"Well, the longer we knew you the less we bothered about it. Of course, we knew a little. The inquiries about your father——"

"I have wanted some long times to tell you and the dear Madame, but I have une grande affreuse—what you call her?"

"Fear—you were afraid to tell us. Then why say anything now if we are content to trust you, and to wait your time?"

"Beecause, mon ami, this trust what is not dead, he will be dead some day sure-lee if I not nevaire say something. You can trust not so always, ce n'est pas possible," and she shook her head.

"All things are possible to those who love," said Edric with a quick glance at the girl. "We trust you, Cecile—I trust you. With all my soul, I trust you! Let it rest at that."

"Non ! non ! it cannot be thus. What ! some day it would come all back the trust that is dead. 'This girl,' you would say, 'what has she done ? What is this blackness ?' Surely it would come so ? Mais ! it is this great fear I had to tell you !"

"Not of yourself, Cecile ?"

"Myself ? Of myself, no truly—you have not the doubt, eh ?"

"Have I not said we trust you absolutely ?"

"This trust I cannot understand him ; he is alive and he is dead. It is bettaire I should tell you and 'the Madame' everything."

"If you wish it, but I do not ask it."

"It is of my father. He is un condamné." She looked steadfastly on the ground at her feet.

"So we assumed. They transport men to the island for very little."

"It was not—little."

"No ? Why torture yourself, Cecile ? Let it go. Your father's crime is not yours."

"My father's life is mine, we are all one, we two—my father and I. We live together all my little time."

"Your childhood ?"

She nodded assent.

"What you think of my father you think of me—we stickit together always—always ! If you say my father is the wicked man I, Cecile, also am the wicked woman, we go shares—'the Madame' so call it—all the time." Her voice was low and

Edric noted the bright sparkle of a tear as it fell swiftly to the ground. "My father—they said he made un meurtre."

"Murder!" Edric uttered the word with startled intonation caught momentarily in surprise.

"Ah! you see—one had need—one had need—for—for——" The sentence was broken as she bent her head and covered her face.

The shadow of the supreme crime that taints not alone the life of the offender but the innocent ones of his family rose between them. Momentarily it was to Edric as if he had come in contact with some evil presence. All the conventions of his training came to the surface at that moment, the rigid code that parts the sheep from the goats, the known guilty from, it may be, the unknown guilty. At that moment his sympathy was chilled; he saw the bent, humbled figure, the shame-hidden face, heard the pain-filled voice as if they were things excluded from consolation.

The revulsion, an almost mechanical throw-back to the conventional code of life, was momentary only. The better part prevailed.

"Cecile, you must not take it so—you must not. It is not just that you should suffer for what he, your father did. Even were he alive—and he is dead."

"They know not, they cannot say."

"It is most probable he is dead—even if he were

not there is nothing to bind you to him. Why should you suffer——”

She lifted her head and looked at him, the fringes of her eye-lids wet with tears.

“This bind—what is it?”

“There is no reason, there is no law that says a daughter shall share her father’s punishment, for such a crime.”

“There is no law thus, eh? No law to make the child be with the father when he wants the child—when there is no one for love but the child; no one to take care of him but the child, eh? It is so in your England?”

“So everywhere.”

“That is a great lie.”

“But, Cecile——”

“You speak to me thus! You, Edrique, you to me thus! You say Cecile—the father he is the wicked man, you leave him, you forget him, let him die——”

“He is dead, Cecile, you forget.”

“But if he is not dead, still you say, ‘Go leave him—he is the wicked man—it is not for the child to be with the wicked father.’ You think thus—you, Edrique?”

“What claim has he on you?”

She rose excitedly. “If your father, the Milord Beeshop, if he made un meurtre—you would say thus: ‘Adieu, mon père! you are the wicked man.

I shall go cross the street from you, you go die! for so much I care.' Eh, thus you, Edrique?"

"No, Cecile! you are right; I would stick by the pater right or wrong, saint or sinner."

"Ah-h-h! it is not your father, it is mine, and you say thus to me—because it is the other father."

"Cecile!" and he caught her by the hand, "I ask your pardon; it is so difficult to get into another's place."

"Eh? thus," and she nodded comprehendingly, "to put the boots on the other fellow—so 'the Madame' says."

"So you followed your father to the island?"

"Ouil! we love the one the other always. Le meurtre it did not mattaire, for so we love—so we trust that is nevaire dead. My father he say to me, 'Cecile, I did not kill this man.' It is enough—but what affaire! If he kill two men he has reason—they were cruel, wicked men—so I trust, so I love him, my father."

Edric thought he had never seen her look more beautiful. Standing in the midst of the wild untouched forest land, breathing its perfumes of resin and leaf into her lungs, the tropic sun dappling the ferns at her feet, the white clustered flowers throwing the dark-haired head, the sweet brave face into relief, she seemed to typify the call of blood to blood, the loyalty of flesh to flesh. Her eyes shone like stars in a crisp winter night, lit as they were by the intensity of her emotion; her head was lifted

with something of wild animal grace, a grace free of artifice or purpose, the nostrils of the clear-cut nose indented by the sharply indrawn breath.

She was as lovely as a wood-nymph, and looking at her with the thrill of her voice in his ears, the atmosphere about her charged with an emotional abandon, Edric was carried beyond the limits of restraint.

"Cecile!" and his hand crushed hers within it to the point of pain. "I, too, love—such love is closer than the love of child and parent. Do you understand?"

She looked at him affrighted, as if her faith in him were shaken, and dawning fear replaced it.

"No! no! Edrique—we ought not to be thus."

"Will you be my wife, *chérie*? My wife, my pure-souled wife?"

"No, no! how could it be so? They would say of you, this wife she is stained with the father's crime—he made *un meurtre*, Edrique."

"So you have no love for me! Not any? Out of all these happy days has no love come to me?"

"Ah! *mon ami*, speak not so. I love you—*vraiment! vraiment!* I love you for always, Edrique, for always—so that I be not—ah! what is it to hurt you not, to be such love for you as would not desolate your life?"

"Be my wife, Cecile."

"It is a wicked woman for me to do such as you say—to make your life all broken. The Milord

Beeshop he would nevaire, nevaire look at you again—the one son Edrique, mon ami, think of the one son. The people of Milord Beeshop they would thus!" and she drew apart with a gesture of contempt.

"You are afraid to face it?"

"Non! non! I am not afraid. It is not I—but you. 'The Madame' says you are the everything, tout le monde, to the Beeshop. He live for you, she says. Mon ami, it is not I you must make the marriage with. It is all wrong I should be here. It was so much happiness I did forget it all. It is so much happiness to see you, often, sometimes. 'The Madame' she is such goodness, the peoples are such goodness, I had not the courage to go away. To-morrow I shall tell her. I shall tell 'the Madame' I must go away."

"Away! Where? You have no home but this, Cecile. Go where?"

"It is not mattaire where—so much mattaire as I go somewhere—not here to stay. Oh! Take me back to 'the Madame,' mon ami, take me back!"

"I love you, dearest. You love me. What good reason is there we should not marry?"

"The good Beeshop he love you, too. He love you as the son, from when you were so little. It is to him you owe somethings—not to me. It is not possible, Edrique, it would kill him."

"Need he know anything about—well, about the past—your father's past?"

"It is not possible not to know. And we womens, we have some—what is his name?"

"Pride, Cecile?"

"Some pride. It would be necessary for him to know."

"Then he shall know!"

Still she resisted, beating him back again and again. "It was not possible, not possible at all."

"If he knows everything and consents. If he comes to you and says, 'Cecile, it is not thus that the sin of the father is visited on the child. It is not so God meant it, not so we should read it. My son's life is dear to me, his happiness depends on you. Be his wife; let me be a father in the place of the dead.'"

"I do not so understand all you speak, Edrique —'the Madame' has taught me much, but all I do not understand, but if Milord Beeshop——"

"If he said thus, you would be my wife?"

She looked up at him with pleading eyes, as if he were compelling her beyond resistance, and at that moment he caught her in his arms and silenced the still protesting lips.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE Madame" as they sat on the broad verandah the following morning laid her work in the ample security of her lap, and gazed through her spectacles at Cecile thoughtfully.

"So it 'as come off, eh?"

Cecile looked puzzled. "This 'come off,' what is he?"

"His name is Edric." Cecile blushed; but the blush only accentuated the sweet content that had so filled her face, from the light of a deep set happiness, as to be read aloud by "the Madame."

She rose, then kneeling by the side of the older woman nestled her face upon her breast. Thus whilst the mother hand slowly stroked her hair, she remained awhile in the joy of sympathy.

"My little girl," said "the Madame" tenderly, "when I was your age it seemed to me that some day I would feel just like that. A sort of 'eavenly sickness—when you don't feel your feet and you want to fly. But——" with a deep sigh that gave a prolonged heave to Cecile's resting-place, "my first 'usband wasn't built on them lines. There's that about a young girl's first love she expects and

mostly don't get. Jim Stubbings sat like a wax figure or a stuffed image looking as though he'd give a mint of money to 'ave a smoke. 'James,' I said, 'this is love—what you read of;' and that ox of a man just wriggled and said, 'Ain't I asked you? That's all right, Mary Ann. You're good enough for me all right: I've 'ad my eye on you for two years. I ain't one for making no mistakes about a wife. You can milk and make bread—and there's some size about you. You ain't like some of them whipper-snapper girls round 'ere. Oh! you'll do all right, Mary Ann, don't you worry about not being good enough for me. Now I'll go and talk it over with the old man. Them two red heifers and the white-faced cow are yours all right, ain't they? 'E give them to you, didn't 'e?' James 'ad come round after 'is breakfast in the men's 'ut to propose, and it was Monday, and I 'ad a big wash that day—but when I went to bed at night and got time to feel disappointed, I just 'ad a big cry. Things were so different from what a young girl expects. Yes, it always seems to me Providence got them men at the wrong ends; for when Dubois came, long after poor Jim 'ad 'is first and last rest, 'e was as romantic as a fairy prince. But law bless you, Cecile! cooking and scrubbing and Jim's asthma 'ad knocked all the romantics out of me. I wasn't taking any at forty years, and so I shut up poor Sherry in no time, and put it all on a business footing. Though I liked 'is ways for all that, and some-

times wished I could take them softer. 'E's that chippy sort of man that don't make a wet season more gloomy than it's got to be. I was born under the blessed sun, Cecile, and I 'ope I'll die under it. Sherry's that way, too—and I often wish 'e'd come long, long ago, when we might 'ave 'ad a little girl of our own. Stubbings said that a family was all right with a dairy—but there wasn't much use for them in cane. So it didn't fret 'im much—but I've been wanting a little girl ever since I can remember. But then, as the dear Bishop says, the ways of Providence are mostly mysterious. But law bless us, you don't understand 'arf of it, and me clucking like a broody 'en when maybe you want to tell the old Madame all about it," and she pressed the girl's head closer to her.

"Ah! Madame, ma mère, truly it is everything I want to tell you. We love the one the other, Edrique and me. It is as you say like the good heaven for happiness. Nevaire was one so happy as me, nevaire! We come home last night, so much slow, we arrête—what you call him? Stop! we stop and we stop to make the heaven again, so much we say of the love we have. Oh! Madame, ma mère, we love so truly as the young peoples love."

"God bless you, dearie, and keep it so. Edric is a good boy. It's 'appiness will come to you all right, never you fear."

"It ees Milord Beeshop I have fear. I have great fear of him, Madame—and Edrique, he

laughs, but he has fear also. I know he has fear of the Beeshop—for what I tell him."

"For what you told him?"

"Indeed so!" Madame looked into a changed face, the love-light quenched, fear and supplication in its place. "It is not so with you, ma mère—that you think the wicked, the ver' wicked you shall nevaire forgive, eh?"

Madame pushed her spectacles to her forehead and wiped her eyes, thus gaining time for the collection of her disjointed senses.

"Never forgive?" she repeated in a tone of inquiry.

"Milord Beeshop, he ees so good, he think so of the ver' wicked. He no touch them with the ver' long pole of so many mètres, eh?"

"Forty foot!" said Madame with mechanical precision.

"Oui! He not touch them so. He is so good."

"You'd better tell me all about it, child. I ain't a wizzard to be able to guess what you're driving at. You may trust the old Madame, Cecile."

Cecile repeated the confession of her father's crime she had made to Edric.

"Pretty bad," said Madame slowly, but the old hand never wavered in its soothing stroke on the girl's thick hair. "Murder isn't like other things—like cattle-duffing, which comes natural to some, or bigamy, which is a sort of mistake. It isn't like any of them things. It's just what it is. But God

knows common justice. What your father did you 'aven't done."

"Ah! Madame, that is the same as Edrique say. But my father and me we stickit together always."

"There's something wrong somewhere," said "the Madame" dubiously. "But I can't just see where it is. It was wrong of your father to kill someone, whatever he did, and it's right of you to stick by your father. Anyhow I don't see that the Bishop's any better than God; and God doesn't do mean things like ruining the life of a girl because her father went wrong."

"It is the peoples, the Beeshop's peoples—what they would say?"

"Well, I know what the curics would say, anyhow!" remarked Madame with grim humour. "But law bless you, child, nobody minds curics. They're born that way."

"He would nevaire say the consent, nevaire!" and she emphasised the word by closer contact to the old Madame at whose side she knelt. "Nevaire!"

"He's got to know, of course. That's honest! You are a proud girl, Cecile. He must take the family or nothing, eh?"

"My father is innocent. He is a doctor of medicine, he is a gentleman of France—and—and we stickit together always."

"Edric will write to 'im, my dear. It will be all right, never you fear. If he comes 'ere—well, I'll tackle 'im myself. Though I ain't confirmed I be-

lieve in God's justice as much as a Bishop, and I ain't so much in the dark as to mistake Him for the devil. The Bishop is just like any other man—and if Mary Ann Dubois isn't equal to any man on two legs, then I'll 'and over the reins of 'Mon Repos' to Sherry."

With the infinite tact born of a kindly heart, "the Madame" consoled and comforted the despondent girl, lit the spark of hope anew in her soul, and in time restored to her face the sweet content that had filled it in the early morning hours.

"Now," said "the Madame," rising, "suppose we go and make a tart for Sherry, and we'll dot it all over with true lovers' knots as a surprise to him. There ain't any better way of breaking the news to a man than through 'is stomach." Subsequently the obtuse Sherry took them for a plastic imitation of spiders.

As Madame in the big kitchen temporarily displaced Ah Sam, the Chinese cook, rolled out her paste on the board and lined the plates with it, making a fine spoon pattern round the edges, she entertained Cecile with advice on matrimonial management.

"What a man wants," said "the Madame," adorning a tart with pastry lattice work, "isn't so much godliness and cleanliness as peace and good victuals. Now me and Sherry 'ave cleanliness enough."

"Madame is so clean as the cat, sure-ly!"

"Well, cats are clean enough, if rubbing their faces means anything. But you may 'ave a sight too much cleanliness. There's poor Priscilla 'Un-ter at Werriwa who suffers from nervous frustration, and, my dear, it's sorry I am for Edward 'Un-ter, 'er lawful 'usband. There isn't any dust in that 'ouse, and there isn't any kind of natural 'appiness. There are no flies on Priscilla either, for she's always catching them with saucers of fly-papers and little cages of coloured paper. Fleas, too! She makes them 'op right enough. If Edward comes 'ome with a flea up 'is leg and she gets to know of it—for men will scratch just like children—lawks! you'd think 'e'd brought 'ome a Bengal tiger. There's enough fuss and worry in Priscilla to drive you mad. Edward when 'e's at 'ome lives mostly outside. 'E isn't allowed to smoke inside on account of the curtains, and if 'e drops a dead match on the floor she gets the dustpan. They've one little girl, and Priscilla 'as just cleaned all the life out of 'er. I've seen that child look at a puddle with a longing that would break your 'art. Nature didn't give 'er curls but she's got them all the same, and for 'er to go 'ome with them curls straightened out frustrates Priscilla for a week. No, my dear, give me a reasonable amount of godliness, likewise cleanliness, which the Scriptures put together, and a 'appy 'ome."

"It ees not good to be too much of anything, eh?" remarked Cecile.

"It's like being wall-eyed in a 'orse; 'e sees all on one side and nothing on the other. Married life," continued "the Madame" as she greased some patty-pans for tartlets, "is like making pastry. What you want is a light 'and, and that's a gift all women 'aven't got. You can make pastry with a 'eavy 'and, but it lies on the chest like a flatiron, and leads to words better left unsaid. When you've got Edric in 'and, Cecile, my girl, don't spoil 'is life with a 'eavy 'and. Most things can be done, and better done, with a light 'and. There are some tragical women who would make a melon-drama out of a wooden nutmeg. Supping soup with the breath or 'andling the knife like a saw ain't elegant, but if you're always nagging at a man on account of them, very likely he'll do them all the more. They're just like that. Take him lightly and you'll get it all right some day. Men and children want a deal of teaching, but you teach them most when they don't know it."

"Edrique, he will teach me; I am so what you call her—know nothing, eh?"

"That's all right, my dear, so long as you're engaged. When you're married you'll find 'e ain't the great Pandanus, or whatever 'is name is, 'e thinks; and you've got to let 'im know it with a light 'and. Then you mustn't think, my dear, that because a man's always round you before 'e's married 'e's going to do that always. By no manner of means! Take my advice, and I've 'ad two.

Take a trip now and again, and don't fix up things too comfortable when you're going. If things go a bit crooked when you're away—well, that isn't for you to worry about. It's good for 'is 'ealth and yours, too, my dear, if 'e gets a notion that there's something for a woman to do when she's at 'ome. Don't invite people to keep 'im company. It's good for 'im to be a bit lonesome. Maybe 'e'll take to writing now and again, and if it is mostly about a new sort of disease in the cane, or a consumptive cow that 'ad to be killed, well, don't you bother. You may just count on it that 'e wants you back, and is ashamed to say it. Most married men are like that; they're just for solid facts when they've got a pen in their 'and. Contrariwise with women. Though it isn't so with Sherry, I must admit. He writes such awful rubbish that I can never read a bit out loud to anyone—which makes them think something 'as gone wrong. 'E's that poetical I 'ave to burn every letter I get. But there, my dear, the tarts are ready for the oven, true lovers' knots and all, and a beautiful clear fire burning. Now we'll go back to the verandah. Ah! there's Sherry!"

"Ma petite ange!"

"Shut the oven door, Cecile, whilst I go and give 'im a kiss. Men always expect that—though why, goodness only knows!"

CHAPTER XXV

A PILE of unopened letters lay on the Bishop's writing-table. He was a methodical man, reputed to be a good administrator. His own life he regulated with a minute precision as to detail that accentuated any lapse from the daily routine. The clock on the mantelpiece already registered many minutes beyond the hour when ordinarily his correspondence, set out in neat piles, some for personal attention, others for those of his Chaplain, who also acted as secretary, was disposed of. As yet he had cut the envelope of one letter only, and its contents of many pages, in a hand that showed little attention to clerical neatness, lay before him. The Bishop rested his head with its sparse thatch of iron-grey hair upon his hands. Had any spectator been present, he would have noted the long unbroken space in which he held this attitude, without the turning of a page. He had ceased to read. The last page with its sprawling signature, "Your affectionate son, Edric Perivale," lay before him, and on it rested the Bishop's spectacles. Indeed it needed an effort to digest the contents of this letter. The "deep amaze" that filled

him clouded the Bishop's mental faculties. He was ordinarily quick to seize the essential facts in the many communications addressed to him, but they were facts exterior to his own personal life. Here was a fact that went right to the core of it, that touched the nerve centre and thrilled him with exquisite pain. Behind the record outspread on the table—his son's confession of passionate love for this woman, an alien in blood and religion and the daughter of an outcast—lay the ghost of the past, a ghost that he had in vain tried to lay by prayer and confession night after night. In his ears clamoured insistently the voice of One who had declared, "I will repay." Though he had done that nameless deed of the past in the passion of a moment, out of the love he bore his sister, not with intent to destroy, but to protect—yet he had taken God-given life. The voice of the Giver came down the centuries. "I will repay. I will repay." Was this the day of retribution for the past? Was God striking at last, striking through his son—his only child and dearer to him than life? Had it all been in vain that he had tried by the appointed means to uphold the church of Christ, to keep alive the flame of sacrifice to Heaven?

He was a poor man, in private life an ascetic. Since his wife's death he had given full rein to a morbid influence that beset him to bear a punishment for the past that would be witness to the truth of his repentance. Amongst his people he was prod-

igal in almost childish giving. No tale of woe was too palpably a lie to be pleaded to the Bishop. He gave without stint of the substance that came to him. To Miss Betty, his sister, was alone given the key to the Bishop's great unwisdom; and even she, though knowing the underlying source of it, was not without an occasional remonstrance. His rigid simplicity of life had made him spare of figure. A thin face and sharply-defined features gave him a certain suggestion of spiritual removal from the average citizen, who reflected in a well-filled presence the fatness of good seasons. To his clergy he fell somewhat short of the Episcopal standard. The voice of authority was heard but seldom, and the breadth of his charity was embarrassing, lacking sectarian limitation. His pronouncements on sin had no vitality; but his mercy for the sinner went to the point of impracticable Christianity—so his clergy thought. Despite a certain courtly manner and self-possessed ease, he did not fit aptly into the more cultured and refined side of his ecclesiastical environment. But getting back from the coastal fringe of urban habitation, he came in closer touch with the elements of colonial life. In some little "tin tabernacle" on the fringe of settlement, he could draw the uncultured hearts of his people very close to him. They would crowd the rude church and still leave a crowd without, listening through the open doors and windows to the voice of the Bishop. The "sundowner," the

"waster," even the hardened "cattle duffer," found a bit of comfort from the odd crumbs that out of adventure of mere curiosity came to them in these Episcopal pilgrimages. "His mercy endureth for ever" was the perpetual strain of the Bishop's sermons. He diversified the texts, but in substance he proclaimed but the one message—the message that came to his own lips as the draught of cool spring water to the lips of the thirsty traveller. It was as if, by daily crying aloud the mercy of God, he could drown the voice that in the stillness of night repeated with merciless reiteration, "I will repay."

Therefore it was that the Bishop neglected his correspondence this morning, and held himself motionless, with head bent and eyes that saw not, over the flimsy pages of his son's confession and appeal. God had struck at last, and through his son.

To an average citizen of the world the mésalliance of his son—even such a union as this would be—is not an event of tragic proportions. It is the making of another man's bed on which the other man must lie, and the philosophic father finds a certain relief in the declaration that he washes his hands of the whole affair.

But the Bishop in the days of his mental suffering had developed a super-sensitive imagination, in which the outer life of man was but a thing of small proportions, and the inner, the spiritual life, the all-essential factor. An alliance such as this might be was akin to social ostracism. Well, that might

be endured—but to the spiritual man it was something more. Bound to such an adventuress as he pictured Cecile to be, despite Edric's glowing panegyrics, the coarsely-fibred daughter of a criminal, herself a participant in the life of the prison, what would become of his boy's soul? He might yet prosper in the world, grow wealthy and be esteemed by men despite this wife, but the nature of his son, its refined perceptions, reverence, faith, purity and that loyalty to Christ's teachings which make up the constituents of character, where would they be? He—his son Edric whom he loved so dearly—would develop with maturity of life into a loud-tongued blatant creature, coarse of word and coarse of thought. The conflict of creeds in his home amidst his children would darken his life—set him against all spiritual things, breed dissent and wrangling without end. It would rip the soul out of him. And as he put it in these terse pregnant words he moved and raised his hands above his head as if in pain and supplication. "Not through him! Oh! my Father, not through him! Punish me, the guilty—punish me, in pain, in sickness, in shame. Let me drain the cup with my own lips, God of my people! but not through his—not through my son's lips. Spare me that!"

The French door that gave access to the broad verandah, shaded from the sun's rays by bamboo blinds, was open to admit the morning air.

He heard the light rustle of a woman's skirt, and with an effort pulled himself together.

"Frank, do you know that it is past ten?"

"Past ten, is it?"

"Why," said Miss Betty, standing behind his chair, "you have not even touched your correspondence! Has something gone wrong, Frank?" and she glanced inquiringly at the pages spread before him, and recognised the familiar writing. "Is it anything about Edric?" He swung round slowly on the pivot chair and faced her; and as he did so she noted the pallor of his face, its but half-restrained muscles, its enforced composure. He made a brave attempt to smile at her with cheerful non-chalance.

"Things will go awry sometimes, Betty! He knows not peace who never knew a pain, eh?"

"What is the trouble, Frank? Is it something we may share?"

For a moment the Bishop hesitated; then he remembered that in any event concealment of the contents of the letter would be a merely temporary expedient. Sooner or later, from his lips or those of others, his son's intention would be made known to her.

"Yes, I think so, Betty—that is I am sure of it. You must know some day, of course, and better now. There! you may read it. We are brother and sister. It is not as if I gave it to a stranger—and—and you will understand it as none but we

two could understand." He passed her the letter, then turned listlessly to the untouched morning task. The action of cutting the envelopes and withdrawing their contents was a relief to the silence of waiting and watching. Whatever happened there was always the day's work, thank God! to give one's mind distraction.

"Frank!" Womanlike she had folded the pages and replaced them in their envelope. No trouble was too great to disturb the acquired habit of "a place for everything" in Miss Betty's methodical economy. "Frank!" The intonation of the word, a blend of surprise, pain, pity, carried sympathy direct to the Bishop's heart.

"Bet!" It was the shortened form of her name in their childhood, and he used it only on odd rare occasions when the crust of reserve was broken between them, a reserve that had its beginnings long ago when taboo was set on a passage in their lives.

She placed her hands on his shoulders, and bent down so that her hair touched his and her lips pressed his cheek. She heard the sob caught in his throat and felt the quiver of his body.

"It—it—isn't the disgrace of the thing, Bet—the social side, you know what I mean—it isn't that, Bet, though there's a sort of blood antagonism against such marriages one can't explain. It isn't that, dear. We could get over that—one grows beyond it here in this land without a class—one grows beyond it slowly. It isn't that, Bet!"

"No, Frank! We could live here always, and perhaps it wouldn't matter. People would talk a little, then forget. It is possible to adjust all that."

"It is the horrible taint of the thing—the taint of the prison. You see, he couldn't forget it. Edric would never let it come to his lips, never—but it would be there, unforgotten, though unspoken. Respect is the only sure basis of happiness in marriage—and——"

"He could not respect her." She completed the sentence for him. "It would always be there at the back of everything, the father, the crime, the prison." She drew a seat to the side of the table and rested her arm on it, her fingers toying with the discarded paper-knife.

He was the first to break the brief silence. "It seemed to me when I read it—it seemed to me," and as she looked at him with the reiterated words on his lips, a great impulse of affection welled in her heart. How furtively the words were uttered, how weakly sensitive were lips and eyes! The mother impulse towards the manifestation of weakness drew Miss Betty closer to him. They sat side by side.

"It seemed to me, Bet, that the old trouble had to be met and—and—faced at last. God is merciful, but He is just also—and we have to take our punishment."

"You think this is God's punishment for the past?"

He bowed his head.

"Frank, you do not mean that you will make no attempt to stop this marriage! I have faith in God as you have, but I cannot conceive a punishment that is not just. It may be your punishment—ours, but what of Edric? It will ruin his life."

"God be merciful to us! I do not know what to do, Bet."

"You think that God would make a vicarious sacrifice of Edric to atone for that night? To me, Frank, it is monstrous, inconceivable!" and she uttered the exaggerated epithets with feminine emphasis.

"It would destroy the boy's soul—kill every good thing in him, such a mating as that."

"I do not know that I agree with you there—not altogether. It seems to shut out all charity. Still it is an awful risk. To me the very things he says of her—her spiritual nature, her purity of soul, her devotion to her father—these are the very things a woman—a wicked, designing woman would use on a man, a young man, like Edric."

"And charity, my sister?" said the Bishop with a faint smile.

Miss Betty bit her lip. After all the lesson of charity, if easy to teach, was not easy to practise.

"One thing is clear, Frank, you must save Edric. Do you know," and she took his hand and held it firmly in her own, as if thus supporting a resolution to have her say out—"do you know, Frank, I think

that since Isobel's death you have let yourself drift into a false world—a world where life is distorted and out of proportion. You are not healthy, Frank; you have let your mind dwell on the past till it has affected your outlook on everything. You are making for yourself a punishment heavier than God Himself would place on you. Brace yourself, Frank! face facts just as facts; let fancies alone for awhile—do not let things go till you can no longer see which is fact and which is fancy. Promise me that you will face this one fact and fight it. The fight will do you good, if only for the fight's sake—but it is far more than that, it is Edric's life at stake, the happiness of all the years before him. Come, Frank, give me your word; we always fought together when we were children—at least I championed you, and you were a great fighter in those old days. Do you know, dear, that a woman would fight even God for the sake of her child! Do you promise?"

She felt his hand close in hers in mute assent. Then, rising, she bent over him again, and raising his face kissed him on the lips.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was a rough night with a stiff "southerly" blowing, and the little tender going out to meet the coastal steamer to put on and take off passengers pitched, tossed, and buried her nose in big seas that as they struck her made every timber quake.

Edric, wet to the skin, kept on deck; for the hole the skipper called his cabin would nauseate the stoutest stomach. Apart from that he loved the sense of adventure, the inky blackness that surrounded him, the roar of the wind, the dash of the waves, the lash of the biting spray on his face. The sense of elemental forces, unrestrained, appealed to him as they appeal to every healthy nature. As the boat rose on the crest of the rollers, he caught momentary glimpses of the dotted line of lights that marked the steamer, waiting its attendant satellite. An impatient whistle, long-sustained, pierced through the noise of wind and wave. The skipper holding fast to the rail of the bridge, his oilskins streaming water, muttered incoherent remarks, complimentary neither to the weather nor the waiting steamer. Regardless of consequences he put her full steam ahead, and the engineer be-

low, sweating like an ox, grunted as he took the signal and put her there. "The old man's been at it again," he commented in relation to a habit of the skipper and plantation rum.

They came alongside the steamer, and the group of passengers looking over the bulwarks of the big coastal boat saw the tender, now far down in the trough of the seas, now rising up and up till she threatened to come aboard, skipper, passengers and all. A few wretched men and women came from the smoking oil-lamp, bilge-water, and cockroach recesses of the tender's cabin, and looking up at the passengers on the steamer whose black side suggested a rock of destruction, wished themselves safe aboard.

"Keep her off, boys—keep her off, you blank, blank fools. Now then! look out below!" and down came Her Majesty's mails, a well-stuffed sack deftly seized as it struck the deck. The passengers' belongings followed without care or ceremony.

The transshipment of the passengers themselves was a parlous business, and effected not without some shrieks from the women, who were roughly but firmly caught by the sailors stationed at the foot of the steamer's gangway.

"Good-bye, Bishop," said the captain of the steamer in an interval of shouting directions. "Sorry you have had such a rough trip. Better luck next time. Be careful, sir, don't jump too soon. Now!" and his Lordship's arm was grasped

by Edric as he landed on the slippery deck of the heaving tender.

"They sent over your wire this morning, father. You've had a bad time!" and the poor Bishop certainly looked pale and woe-begone. "I sent word to Mon Repos, and 'the Madame' wanted you there—but I thought perhaps you'd prefer a camp with us at the mill, to-night at all events. Some of the chaps are quite excited. Never saw a Bishop—think it's something out of a menagerie," and Edric gave a little nervous laugh.

"Certainly with you, Edric. Quite the best thing. Thank 'the Madame' all the same; she's the soul of hospitality. I think perhaps I'd better go below."

"Better stay on deck, sir. It's bad enough here—but below! I've got an old set of the skipper's oilskins. If you don't mind putting them on we'll make shift on deck."

"Why, Edric, you're wet through—wringing!"

"Oh, that doesn't matter—one takes things as they come in these parts. I've toughened a bit since you saw me last, father. It's jolly to have a dash of the sea now and then."

"Well, there was a day when I would have enjoyed it myself," remarked the Bishop sympathetically, as he got into the stiff coat with its huge collar.

They hauled off and the steamer went its way. The yellow light in her port-holes diffused a cheery

suggestion of home and security, but the tender was wet and miserable. When at last the steamer had gone northward beyond their sight, they found consolation in looking, as they rose with the swell, at the faint glimmer of the beacon fire that had been lit ashore to the left of the sand bar at the river's mouth. The tide was coming in, and they might be able to cross the bar without delay.

"Once we're over we'll be getting near home," said Edric by way of heartening his father.

As they came close in shore, the Bishop saw, ghost-like, through the enveloping darkness, the phosphorescent gleam of the surf as it broke on the long sweep of shelving beach. The skipper determined to take the bar at about three-quarter tide—the skipper took chances as he took his meals, they were all in the day's work. The tender, with a full head of steam on, made a dash. There was a nerve-grating quiver through the timbers of the boat and the thing was done.

"There we are! over all right; just touched. She's a good little craft, or that mad fool Mc-Donagh would have piled her up long ago. Now we're in smooth water, father, suppose you take a stretch, and put your head up here." The Bishop, with the simple obedience of a child, stretched himself along the seat and pillowed his head on his son's lap. There he dozed at intervals, till the few scattered lights of the township at the bend

of the river, lights that announced the event of the week, the arrival of the mail, came in view.

The tender was moored to the pile jetty and they disembarked.

"I have two 'boys' waiting with a boat to pull to the mill. You must be awfully tired, sir—but you haven't much further to go now. Ah! there's the boat. Hi! you Tommy there, bring her alongside."

Tommy and Joseph, the two Kanakas in charge of the boat, brought her alongside the jetty. As they did so, and the passengers came within the radius of light cast by an oil lamp, Joseph remarked to Tommy somewhat contemptuously:

"That fellow Bishop?" and Tommy replied with the air of one who, going out to see an elephant, beholds, as Mr. Chadband has remarked, a mouse: "That fellow plenty—fraud."

Tommy and Joseph put a dejected back into their oars as they pulled into the stream, and headed the boat for the mill. What had they come out to see?

The camp stretcher is a couch of limited proportions, with a sag in the middle that makes the bones of the city man ache. The Bishop passed a not too pleasant night; but towards morning, weariness overcame discomfort, and he fell asleep.

When Edric came to wake him, he looked down on the greying hair and sallow face creased by many a wrinkle, with a quick touch of emotion. "The dead old dad" was drifting into age. He had been the best of fathers. With a quick shame-

faced look round the room, as though he feared some eye might note the impulsive action, he knelt at the side of the couch. Childhood had momentarily returned to him at sight of the face so intertwined with it. He had given a free obedience to his father—the obedience of respect and love, such an obedience as the traditions of his class assigned to the father from the son. But whilst he prayed that after all these years there should come no estrangement between them, no thought of vacillation crossed his mind. He and Cecile were pledged to each other—that fact was paramount without regret but with joy only in his heart. There was but one way for them. His prayer was that the taking of that way should not involve the breaking of the blood tie that held him to the man at whose side he knelt—his father. He rose: if God willed it—so it was best. Whatever the consequence he must be loyal to the man within him, cleaving to the woman he loved. There was in the end but one allegiance possible.

He refrained from waking the Bishop, and gave directions that so far as possible quiet should be secured to him. The tired man slept till late in the afternoon, when he woke and dressed himself, refreshed by the hours of unbroken slumber.

Edric had prepared for him a light meal with abundant tropic fruit, mangoes, grenadillas, paw-paws, guavas. Afterwards they sat in the verandah of the quarters and talked discursively on topics of

mutual concern, avoiding, as if eager to secure an hour of tranquil association, any reference to the one matter that in the thoughts of each underlay all the rest.

"Would you like dinner late, father? We usually make it a mid-day meal, but I have arranged to have it late during your stay with us."

"Yes, Edric—if it will not upset the household. Suppose we take a walk; the sun is going down and we may get a breath of cool air. Last night's southerly may repeat itself, probably will, I should think, after to-day's steam bath. Suppose you turn dinner into supper."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea."

"Of course, you know—er—you know the reason of my visit?"

"I suspected it, sir, though you did not refer to my letter. You received it, of course?"

"Yes! I thought it would be better for us to talk it out. You prefer that?"

"Yes! It is the better way."

"Get our hats, then. We can talk with less restraint as we walk. I always feel that way, don't you?"

"Well, yes! I must say I do."

"Confessions are best made in the dark, too, Edric!"

They started on their way, taking a rough track that led through the scrub. The feeling of restraint between them had not been wholly broken

by the Bishop's reference to the reason of his visit, and for awhile they walked along the track in silence.

The Bishop cleared his throat with a suggestion of summoned resolution.

"First of all, Edric, I want to know exactly how you stand in this matter. Of course, I know the temptations of life—they come to all of us; none escape them. Some resist and rise the stronger for the conquest—others fall, and God is merciful to the fallen. You have been a good son, Edric—and you have given me more than mere duty—mere duty," repeated the Bishop, lingering on the words.

"I have, father!"

"When a father and son have that between them, the bitterness of confession is wiped out—it has no humiliation, Edric."

"I have always told you the truth, sir, always."

"Always. Your answer 'yes' or 'no' is all I ask. Have you, Edric—have you—in short, is this marriage to be an atonement?"

"If you knew her, such a thought would not enter—could not enter your mind. She is a pure, good woman. Spotless as a saint, sir!"

"Spotless as a saint," repeated the Bishop musingly; then, quite irrelevantly as it seemed to Edric, he looked at him and said, "How old are you?"

"Twenty-five, sir!"

"Twenty-five; I should have remembered it, yet for the moment you seemed a boy again. Ah!

Edric, how the years go!" Then he recalled himself. "I take your word, of course. Then, why this marriage?"

"Because I love her, sir—because we love each other."

"If it were a matter of chopping words between us I might say that I asked you for a reason, and—well, you gave me a sentiment. But there! It isn't so; I understand you perfectly. You are in love. I understand what you mean. You are in love, and being an honourable man you think of marriage."

"If you only knew her, sir!"

"Of course, Edric, it is but natural for you to think her everything. Love blinds us to-day—and to-morrow when it is all too late we come to our sight again and repent unavailingly." He stopped suddenly, and laying his hand on the young man's arm gripped it with the firm tender touch of affection. "You are my son, my only child, Edric, and I want to restore you to clear, sane vision, before it is too late."

Edric bent his head in silence.

"Marriage is not a pastime, a pleasure trip into the Unknown from which one may return later on; the trip at an end, the whole matter to be relegated to a memory pleasant or unpleasant. Marriage is a journey that may possibly commence in Paradise, but sooner or later gets into the dusty track of the world. It is then that the real test comes—and it

is a test that tries even the best of marriages. You may survive the discovery that your goddess is made by mortal hands, and with human fallibilities; you may in the end average her with mere mortals; you may survive even the detection of spots in your spotless saint, but what you cannot survive, Edric, is loss of respect for your wife. Respect is the appreciation of moral fibre in life. Defective it may be in this or that detail, but the moral fibre is there, you are conscious of it, you recognise it underlying even her errors. That in the end is the link that keeps a good man and a good woman together. Have you thought of this, Edric? Is this woman with whom you would venture the whole happiness of your life such a one as that? Think of the past from which you draw her. Does it give you assurance of the trust and respect that are the vital essentials of a happy married life?"

"I trust her, sir, with my whole soul. Father, you do not know her as I do! How could you! You call her past 'a black past,' you who do not know it. Why, it is a past of supreme sacrifice, the purest affection, such an affection as I, your son, bear to you, my father. Cecile not true to the core? Cecile not true?—why, there is none truer, none sweeter, none purer than she. If you knew the whole story, sir, you would not doubt it."

"You told me sufficient of the story in your letter."

"And you doubt it?"

"I do not doubt your faith in it."

"But you doubt the story itself?"

"If you look at it dispassionately you will pardon my mistrust. The whole of the circumstances of her life give food for doubt. She has every reason to deceive you. Successful deception means to her comfort and security in life; without it they must be absent. Do you really think, Edric, a woman has no temptations, no war to wage for her own saving? Believe me, the battle is as fierce for her as for you. In the battle of self-preservation women as well as men pick up what weapon offers itself. If it were not so, what need of God's mercy, Edric? We need it, every one of us;" and had Edric been less self-absorbed he might have noticed a nervous tremor at the corner of the Bishop's mouth, as the words left his lips.

"It may be so, sir. All you say may be true, but I trust Cecile absolutely. I love her, I trust her, I believe in the truth of God in her, as I believe in God Himself, and—I shall marry her. If she came from the slums of sin—still she would come white and clean to me because she is Cecile, because I love her."

"Then all your answer to me, Edric, is this—'I love her.'"

"Yes, sir—it is the beginning and the end. You have told me you had a will, once, long ago, and you broke it for duty and the church."

The Bishop assented by a gesture.

"I am your son, and I have my will from you. But I cannot break it for duty or any call, not even for you, sir. I must keep it strong and sure to win love's way for me. Everything may go before I break my will and lose Cecile, let her slip into darkness, pain—Heaven knows what."

The Bishop stood and gazed at him in silence.

"Edric!" he said at length.

"Father!"

"I—I—know it all, Edric—I know what it means. It came back for a moment at your words like some dead thing, some dead thing stirring anew to life. Ah! Edric, the pity of it, just think of the pity of it."

"The pity of it?"

"This love of youth that makes for immortality and wakes to clay!"

"I do not understand you. I love Cecile. I shall marry her. She is not immortal, but as you and I; still we love each other." He paused. "We want your consent to our marriage, sir!"

"Not now, Edric—not now—you must give me a little time. It is too much to ask me now. Just when you have worked on me. I have to think of your future—I must think it all out quietly, calmly, in the dry light—the dry light. Give me your arm and let us go home. I am getting old, I suppose. And you love her, love her like that, Edric?"

Darkness had fallen, and with faces that were spared the light they went homeward.

CHAPTER XXVII

MON REPOS was in a turmoil of cleansing and excitement. It was one of "the Madame's" many fixed ideas that, however lax in outward manifestation the everyday hospitality of her home might be, the reception of the Bishop must be marked by such a setting of the house in order as drove poor Dubois in haste to the grateful relief of his vacuum pans and centrifugals.

A couple of "Marys" had been brought in from the field, despite Government regulations to the contrary, and set to work scrubbing every inch of exposed floor till it was white as the deck of a man-o'-war.

"The Madame" herself trotted here and there, issuing manifold instructions, with the keenest of eyes for all slumming of work. Cecile went early to the garden before the dew was off the flowers, and returned laden with scented blossoms to fill all the available vases. "The Madame" herself had never attained an artistic standard beyond the bouquet, a composition of flowers incongruous in hue, crushed together in pitiless restraint. It had taken Cecile no little pains and patience to convince

the good soul that there was true beauty in the deftly arranged spray, in imitation of the free grace of nature. In the end, however, she left this part of the household duties to Cecile. The daily task was a delight to the girl, and in Dubois' native appreciation of artistic effort she found her reward. To-day's effort was a special one, and remembering Edric's tales to her of rose-filled English gardens, she gathered great clusters of cream, saffron-yellow and damask-red roses. They grew with wild luxuriance in the straggling garden round the plantation home, bud quickly bursting into blossom, and blossom as quickly scattering its petals on the ground in prodigal fecundity. Ordinarily the girl carried out her pleasant task to a subdued accompaniment of song—little chansons from her childhood—filling her heart with sweet peace and tender thoughts. Her life was so absorbed by love in these days that it almost cast out fear, almost banished the ache for the absent father. Almost, but not wholly, for at times fear and pain, as if in dumb resentment of such excess of happiness, forced their way to the surface.

To-day there were no chansons on her lips, and the ivory-tinted face was barren of all warmth of colour. If the Bishop on the night of his arrival slept but poorly, there was another whose eyes did not close at all, but stared sleeplessly into space. The garden without lay bathed in moonlight. The cool south wind brought new life to the sun-tired

flowers. Giant blossoms of the magnolia breathed sensuous fragrance into the night. The sleepless girl rose, and noiselessly on bare feet, her white gown open at the neck, her black hair braided to a single strand, passed into the verandah and sought surcease from her fears in the tranquillity of the scene. Beyond the garden the cane-brake rustling its leaves in the night breezesounded anechoed lullaby, caught, it might be, from the distant sea. She lifted her head and drew in deep breaths of the sweet-scented air. It was a night for lovers, but they were apart—Edric and she. The night so full of peace and beauty would pass away, and to-morrow break. Night after night in this same perfumed garden the moon would set its benediction of a wondrous world-excluding peace—and they might be apart. His dear heart's strings might no longer draw her to him—for to-morrow another, perhaps a deeper, love would stand between them. If it came to parting, how could she face it?

The Bishop would arrive for luncheon, a meal unknown in the ordinary economy of the household, and a special institution for occasions of ceremony. "The Madame" had prepared for her guest's entertainment many delicacies including a fruit-salad, in which the distinctive flavour of each contributing fruit was blended into delectable confusion. This dish, combined with cream, might well set the worthy man on the fair way to a subsequent bilious attack not included in "the Madame's" scheme of

hospitality. The previous evening she had spent in cloister-like seclusion, committing to a defective memory the due "renunciation of the devil and all his works, the pomps and vanity of this wicked world," wondering, poor soul, what particular form of sin "pomps" were. The confirmation service hung over her with the depression of a thunder-cloud. However, if she skipped a bit of her duty to her neighbour, and with unwitting wisdom confounded other portions with her duty to God, she had an inward conviction that the Bishop would wink at the offence with Christian charity. Of this she had the greater assurance because the primary reason of the visit doubtless concerned not herself but Edric and Cecile.

She had contemplated the prospect of a happy union between the young people with less optimism of heart since the girl's confession. Not even in the unconventional atmosphere of her own life could the importance of the family record be wholly disregarded. She recalled in the memory of her younger days certain families who were held, by reason of laches on the part of some members, to be of inferior social caste to others. The goat and sheep distinction penetrated deep into life, and the goat's family suffered the odium of his personal offence. But the realisation of the fact that Cecile's family record was not such as would commend itself to the Bishop for union with his own did not weaken her loyalty to her adopted daughter. The

months of close association between them had convinced "the Madame" of the sterling worth of the girl's character on the ethical side, and had at times surprised her with glimpses of a world of spiritual life to which she herself had never gained admittance. There was much she taught Cecile, the necessary useful arts of every day, the commonplaces of existence—but as they grew closer to one another, the older woman recognised that there was a part of Cecile which moved and had its being in a world closed to the eyes of this toil-bred woman of the soil. The soul of "the Madame" had been early cramped by the pressure of utilities, whilst Cecile's took flight like the forest bird which knows no limit but its will.

As Cecile, on this eventful morning, bent mute and concentrated over the task of arranging her harvest of flowers, "the Madame," remembering what the stress of the coming visit must mean to her, relaxed for the time her vigilant guard over the floor-scrubbing "Marys" to chat with her.

"My dear little girl ain't 'erself this morning, eh? Don't take it to 'eart so much, dearie. It'll come all right, never you fear. When me and Sherry was engaged unknown to my family, all on account of Dubois being foreign, which they never could abide and I knew it, though me a widow who might well 'ave 'er own way—many's the tear I dropped, thinking that number two would never come off; but there, law bless you! When I broke

it to them I just said, 'There 'e is, Thomas Peter,' which was my brother's name, 'and likewise Susanah Edith Daphne'—which was my own sister's name—'there 'e is, and I mean to take 'im for my second lawful 'usband, and I prefer to 'ear no language, my mind being made up for certain,' why, it passed off like as if nothing 'ad 'appened; Sherry being so affable and them being so dumbfounded as they couldn't speak for surprise and looking at 'im. My brother Thomas Peter didn't say anything for ten minutes, 'is eyes just glued on Sherry. Then 'e caught 'im by the arm when 'e got a chance, and said, 'Come and 'ave a drink—if you can drink,' and when 'e found 'e could, and as much as Thomas Peter, they got most agreeable. So there, you see, my dear, things are never what you expect them to be—by no manner o' means. Don't you get downhearted, Cecile, true love will win the day, take the old Madame's word for it."

" 'The Madame' has always the consolations. You are ver' good to me, ma mère—so good I know not how to say some things," and lacking in words, she let the flowers in her hands fall on the table, and impulsively threw her arms round "the Madame's" neck and kissed her. "It is such fear I have he will not say the consent."

"Then, my dear, you will 'ave to make the best of it, and do without 'is consent. Though, of course, I'd rather you 'ad it. It would be best for all, being too 'is only child."

She felt the girl's face pressing against her own.

"My father and I—we stickit always together—so Edrique and his father they must stickit always together. If he will not consent—we must not marry, nevaire!"

"Nonsense, child! 'Usband and wife are more than child and parent—'aven't we got the Scriptures for it? You and your father must 'ave been wondrous close together, Cecile, wondrous close. I suppose it's on account of your mother dying when you were so young, as you told me. But you just put your trust in Edric—'e's a good man but 'e's got a will of 'is own and no mistake. You'll be married to 'im before you know where you are."

Cecile had returned to her task, and, giving no reply, "the Madame" wondered if she, too, might not have a will of her own, a will that could neither be bent nor broken.

The silence was interrupted by the barking of a dog.

"Bless us! that's Billy's bark; 'e went out with Dubois this morning, and that's Sherry's voice, too. The Bishop must 'ave gone down to the mill first—and they're coming back."

"Wipe your boots, Sherry, wipe your boots!" croaked the ancient cockatoo in the verandah, and Madame blushed to the roots of her hair.

"That awful cockie, Cecile, 'e'll say something dreadful! The way them cockies 'ave of picking up language! 'Ere you, Mary, run out and put a

duster over 'is 'ead till the Bishop gets inside, then take 'im down to the men's 'ut." The young Kanaka woman whom she addressed grinned. "He plenty fellow say swear, that cockie," and ran out with a duster, underneath which the hapless cockie indulged in smothered abuse as the Bishop arrived at the house.

"Madame, you will let me go for the little while till I am—what you call her—to be like myself?"

"Run away, dear—there's some sally volatile in my room in the left 'and corner of the second drawer to the right of the wardrobe. You've got to look your best to-day. You needn't come down till you 'ear the gong," and Cecile hastily departed to her room.

Madame took off her big sun-hat, which she wore indoors and out during the hours of household duty. To take it off meant that rest-time had come. She patted her hair, and gave a few adroit tugs to her skirt, then went out to meet the Bishop.

"Madame Dubois!"

"My Lord—you, Mary there, take 'is Lordship's 'at and stick. We are that glad to see you," and she led the way to the little-used guest chamber, the "drawing-room," where ordinarily the green rep-suite which had descended from the days of "number one" stood in the bashful modesty of holland covers, to-day removed in honour of the occasion.

"Dubois, bring the easy chair near the French door so that 'is Lordship may get the breeze! Perhaps the Bishop would like a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

"No, thanks! Though if it would not be a trouble I should like a lemon squash. I've been all over the mill with Monsieur, and I do feel a little thirsty. My dear Madame Dubois, what a delightful prospect you have from here—that glimpse of the river is refreshment in itself."

Madame bustled off to make the squash with her own hands. Such a task could not be left to those of an uncultured "Mary."

The gong had sounded for luncheon, and Madame was looking at the door with ill-concealed expectation, when Cecile entered the drawing-room. The Bishop as he rose caught a glimpse of the white-clad figure that moved towards "the Madame's" side, a glimpse brief but all-sufficient to finally upset his preconceived idea of "the adventuress" into whose toils his son had fallen. He had, before the interview with Edric, expected to meet a woman of a type familiar to him through the pages of French fiction—for there had been a day when such fiction was not wholly unknown to him—a creature with a suggestion of glitter covering the commonplaces of superficial charms, alluring to the eye of youth, of somewhat ample proportions and sensual lines; and he found a simple girl whose formal inclination at Madame's introduc-

tion suggested withdrawal rather than assertion. He was conscious of a double relief, in having a less "robustious" opponent to meet, and at the assurance that his son's infatuation was not the mere allurements of a physical sense. With a better opportunity of observation at the luncheon-table, he confessed a certain charm in the girl, the charm of an innate refinement that suggested itself in the clean cut of the eyebrows, the delicate pencilling of the lips. The conversation was almost wholly confined to "the Madame" and the two men. Cecile was self-conscious. She would have given the world to play a part—to do something, however artificial—that would attract to her the interest and the sympathy of the Bishop. At times she felt herself on the brink of a half-hysterical exclamation, as if the tension of the situation must be relieved at all hazards.

The Bishop addressed some conventional remarks to her, and once, with hesitation masked by an elevation of the eyebrows and a tone of voice suggestive half of apology, half of tolerant unbending, ventured a sentence in French.

The concentration needed for this effort so absorbed the Bishop's faculties that he did not catch the momentary expression of puzzlement in the girl's eyes—though he did for a moment dwell inwardly on the irrelevancy of her answer.

The conversation dragged, the orbits of common interests not coinciding. "The Madame" was

nervously intent on her guest's full enjoyment of the hospitality she had provided, Dubois wholly lost in matters exterior to sugar, and the Bishop gruelled for lack of matter upon which he might discourse with ease. The processes by which the juice of the cane was converted into granulated sugar were familiar to him, but on such matters of moment to his host as the relative merits of Rose-bamboo, Meera, Big Elephant, Striped Mauritius, the infinite variety of other canes, their disease-resisting and productive qualities, he was as hopelessly at sea as the unfortunate Dubois would have been in a discussion on the most recent heresies of the German critics of the biblical text. To Madame the whole attempt at agreeable conversation was vanity of vanities. She ceased even her brief commentative interjections when the Bishop delivered a last stroke at the disjointed entertainment by declining to partake of the fruit-salad.

After luncheon Dubois and the Bishop betook themselves to the verandah. The mid-day heat permeated the air with the suggestion of a furnace. A great stillness oppressed the ears, for even the locusts had ceased their skirling. The Bishop, seated in a deck chair of ample proportions, had consumed but half his cigar—and being from Dubois' case it was a well selected weed—when sleep so sorely beset him that he suggested "forty winks." Cecile, seeing from the covert of the drawing-room door that opened on the verandah the Bishop rest-

ing with relaxed head against the canvas-backed chair, felt her spirits rise from the depths of their dejection. He looked so weary and prematurely aged, one could not feel the sense of fear at such a presence. Leaving "the Madame" to the enjoyment of an uneasy siesta in the comfortless clasp of an easy chair, she slipped away to her bedroom and sat there at the open window thinking, hoping, vainly speculating on the future that in a little time would be determined for her. She had half expected Edric with his father, but the Bishop had brought his apologies. No doubt, it was thus arranged between them. My Lord Bishop desired to judge for himself.

Time sped as she lost herself in reverie, becoming so absorbed in it that she did not hear the knock at her door nor the handle turn, but uttered an exclamation of surprise as she felt "the Madame's" hand upon her shoulder.

"Cecile, the Bishop would like to speak to you. He is waiting in the drawing-room."

The girl turned, with flushed face at the reaction of her thoughts.

"Milord Beeshop wishes to speak to me—alone, with myself only. Ah-h!" and she rose, a slight tremor in her voice.

"Cecile!" and Madame drew the young, slight figure to her. "Cecile, my dear, you must be brave and true, my little girl, and—— Oh, dearie! I wish you all—all the luck of the world."

She linked her arm in hers, and leading her to the broad passageway, left her with a kiss on the lips.

Cecile knocked at the closed door, and heard the voice of the Bishop within: "Come in!"

He rose as she entered, and walked across the room to close the door behind her.

" 'The Madame,' she say you wish to see me."

He placed a chair for her with an air of old-fashioned courtly formality that became him. "Will you permit me?" and he seated himself before her, his back to the light—it was an odd scrap of diplomatic art he had acquired.

"You will have surmised my object in asking the favour of this interview, Miss—Miss——"

"Bertrand. My father's name was Ernest Bertrand. He was a doctor of medicine."

"So my son has told me. You will excuse me if we speak in English. My French was once considered excellent, but it is so long since I have used it, many years now, that it would be more difficult for me to recall it with fluency than for you to understand my own tongue—since now you use it so well."

"The English, I now speak her parfaitement. Edrique, he has——" with a deep conscious blush she hastily corrected herself. "Monsieur Perivale has so told me. It will be all easy for us to understand in the English."

"Quite so—quite so!" The Bishop was awkward in attack.

"Truly!" assented the girl naïvely.

"My son has informed me—has informed me—er—that in fact—in short, there is—er—some sort of understanding—des intelligences—between you."

"Yes, Milord! He has so told you—indeed."

"In short, you are—er—what is known as—er—in love with one another?"

She bowed her head in grave assent. "We love the one the other. Edrique he said to me, he said, 'Cecile, I love you'—yes, indeed!"

The Bishop looked at her from the corner of his eye. Was this really innocence or—

"Of course! of course! I shall not pain you by entering into details."

"We love the one the other always. It is so with me truly, and with Edrique, just so he said, truly!"

"No doubt—but—but that is not quite the point."

"Ce n'est pas le 'point?' What is this 'point?' "

"I am coming to it. You wish to marry my son—er—that is my son wishes to marry you!"

"Oh, yes! Milord Beeshop—it is thus we say. We shall marry when we have the consent."

"My son, Miss Cecile—may I trespass so far?—my son is a poor man who has yet to make his way in the world."

"Me, I am but a poor girl without a sou of dot!"

The Bishop seized the opening. "Of course, as you say, that in itself might be regarded as an impediment."

"This 'impediment,' what is she?"

"It would make it wrong for you to marry without prospect, without hope of some provision before you."

"It is not so in France. The wife is the great help—the ever so much help to her husband in the beezeness!"

"Ah, the business. Yes, the shop, of course; but this is not quite the same."

"It is not so in this country, eh?"

"In certain avocations, no doubt—on a dairy, for example, but in a saw-mill I am afraid——"

She looked at him in a troubled way, the subtle pathos of which was lost on the Bishop, who was now well settled in his chair, the fingers of his long white hands tapping each other gently as he gazed contemplatively at the ceiling. "In a saw-mill I am afraid——"

"It would be no good for me, this saw-mill, eh? I can write and make the figures sure-ly!"

"My dear Mademoiselle, it is not that sort of thing, you know."

"Oh!"

"The more I think of it the more I am convinced it would be a great mistake for you—for him." He looked at her with an air of genial benevolence, assuming to her a quasi-paternal attitude.

"Oh, Milord Beeshop! Me, I would not make the life of Edrique all desolate—it is not for that!"

"I have every reliance on your generosity, Miss Cecile. True love is a complete sacrifice," said the Bishop in his best ecclesiastical manner.

"If Edrique shall say to me, 'Cecile——' "

"There again, excuse me, that is not the point. It is not what my son may say that we have to consider—you and I who love him—it is not what he may say or even think; it is for us to determine what is best for him, because we love him."

"I do not understand." She appealed to him with such pathetic eyes that the Bishop again sought refuge in the ceiling.

"Hem!" and he steadied his voice, and once more applied himself to the judicial tapping of his finger-tips. "There are also, of course other reasons——" It was well for the preservation of the judicial attitude that he did not see the anguish that filled the girl's face.

"It is the meurtre," and he could not but note the changed key of her voice, the huskiness of its utterance. "Edrique has told you. Me, I said to him you must tell Milord Beeshop everythings. Is it beecause they say my father made un meurtre? Oh, Milord, it is a wicked lie. It was not he. He is innocent—with his own lips he told me, 'Cecile, I did not kill him.' It is a wicked lie, indeed it is a wicked lie!"

The Bishop made no reply. Throughout the in-

terview he had been conscious of something artificial, something mean, in his attitude to the girl. At heart he was a better man, and the part he had set himself to play he played at the cost of his self-respect. Every glance he gave at her weakened his resolution, made him question his own conclusion. This girl was not as he had pictured her; the direct simplicity of her appeal disarmed him. Whatever evil lay behind her she was no adventuress, no woman whose feet took hold of hell to drag his son's soul into the pit—yet he could not face the thought of marriage between them.

He rose from his chair with quick determinate action, as if casting aside the pose he had assumed. The girl looked up at him and saw a new "Milord Beeshop." He took her by the hand.

"Mademoiselle! let us face each other and understand."

"Yes, Monseigneur!" She gave him the title that came naturally to her lips, and stood before him inspired with a sense of self-respect caught from his own.

"You are a good woman, the daughter of a gentleman, whatever his crime may be. Now listen! I do not say that he, your father, is guilty. I do not know anything about it, but you are his daughter and I accept him as a gentleman. You love my son Edric?"

"I do most truly—indeed!"

"I am his father, and I love him, too. I have

but one child, and all the love of my life has gone to him, a love deeper than the love I gave his mother, deeper than the love I gave any living soul. I want him to be a true man, and here, close to the heart of life, he will grow into a brave, strong, able man. Things are possible here that are not possible where you and I come from. A man may climb to the topmost rung of life out here—even if he start at the bottom. But to do it he must be free, he wants his liberty—and a wife and children are chains on the young man who seeks to climb. I ask you to do something for him and me—because I am his father, because you love him. If you love him as you say you do, as I believe you do, you will give me what I ask.” In the vehemence of his appeal he spoke rapidly, and without thought of the girl’s defective knowledge of his English tongue.

“Is it that the marriage will hurt him always, that I shall be the—the—the——”

“Burden to him, Mademoiselle. It sounds a cruel word, but it would be true of any woman at this time. But apart from all that there stands a barrier between you that—that makes it quite impossible.”

“Comme ça? Is it the great barrier where the sea beats evaire? So as if one beat the heart against it always, always?”

“Just such a barrier.”

“Me! I hear it beat in my ears always. It nev-

aire cease to beat—boom! boom! but the barrier she nevaire move herself—nevaire!”

“One cannot blot out the past. They would find it all out, rake up the dead ashes of it all. Your father’s history would stain your life. It is a cruel social law; but it stands!”

“It is this barrier they make between the peoples of the prison and those others, eh? Is it for the childrens also?”

“Yes!”

“For the ver’ leetle childrens?”

“It is the law of God and of society.”

“Non! non! not of the bon Dieu! It is wicked—wicked—surely!”

“Edric would have to face it, and repent in bitterness!”

“For the marriage?”

He bowed his head.

“Thus you ask it, for me to say the adieu, the good-bye, to Edrique for all the time?”

The Bishop felt his heart grow weak, his resolution momentarily slacken, as he glanced at her face. The dark depths of the eyes set in the pallor of the girl’s face were filled with dumb animal pain.

“I want you to be brave for Edric’s sake, for mine, for your own. Listen! I don’t wish to be cruel—I hate to say it; it hurts me as much as it will you—but I want you to see it clearly. You are the daughter of a criminal, at least a convict; you are alien to us in race, in religion; if you marry

my son you will destroy his life. All he might be with his present freedom, with a marriage hereafter in his own race, his own class, his own religion, you will make impossible. Will you do it? Or will you give me back my son—save him for me—save him from himself? If I have hurt you, it is because I love Edric. If you cross my son's life you will destroy it. Will you let him go free? Is your love strong enough for that, or is it only a school-girl's fancy—a summer day's romance?"

"Monseigneur, it is—it is strong enough even for that! It is not what you say."

"There, child, sit down. I've hurt you desperately. Shall I ring for Madame?"

"No! no! not yet; one minute, then it is all right. Do you mind to so sit that I may see your face—to say the ver' hard things to say?"

He seated himself before her, levelling face with face. Then the wistful eyes with their pain looked straight at him.

"Me, I so love your son, Monseigneur—I so love him as the bon Dieu and His saints have witness—that—that I give him back to you." She stopped, and he saw her looking beyond him even as she looked into his eyes. "It was the night we sail down the river, making such happiness—oh! Monseigneur! Monseigneur!" She stopped, her hands clasped tight in self-control.

When she was calm again she rose and moved to the door.

"Do you forgive me, Mademoiselle?"

"It is not forgiveness. For why? We all two love him—but it is different, the love for the man of the woman, and the love of the father for the child."

"In sacrifice it is the same!"

"It is not Monseigneur makes the sacrifice—no, it is I—the woman—truly!" and the Bishop took the rebuke with a wince.

"I may say the good-bye—sure-lee. Ah, Monseigneur, I may see him nevaire once more—sure-lee?" and she looked at him as a child beseeching at once a pardon and a favour.

But the Bishop bit his lip and controlled his voice.

"Not if you love him, Cecile!"

"It is beecause I so love him, Monseigneur—just beecause!"

"If you love him you will spare him that."

She put out her hand and steadied herself against the upright of the door as she passed into the passage-way.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE Madame," who at times of domestic crises went into retreat in the comfortable and homely seclusion of her private pantry, whose shelves were laden with such products of the housewife's skill as pineapple conserve, rosella jam and guava jelly, waited there in her basket-chair with the placidity of one who, having come to a resolution, bides the hour of its fulfillment. She heard through the open door of her pantry the final words uttered as Cecile left the room, and the rustle of the girl's dress along the passage. To the keenly apprehensive ear there are cadences even in the rustle of a woman's skirt—cadences of joy and sorrow; so that it did not need the tell-tale face that looked at "the Madame" from the framing of the pantry doorway to let her know the result of the interview.

Cecile, child-like, seated herself on the floor by the basket-chair and put her head on the old woman's lap. "The Madame" said nothing, but laid her hand on the girl's head as if in mute motherly benediction she marked the relationship constituted between them.

The touch of that kindly hand made kin between them. As the girl thus found relief, "the Madame" punctuated Cecil's sobs with exclamations of "Poor lamb!" "There now, honey, don't break your heart. It will all come right! Them as God means to join together He don't let go asunder, never you fear! Don't cry like that, dear, or you'll make the poor old Madame as bad as yourself," and heavy tears coursed down the channels of her nose, and plashed on the black hair of the head hidden in her lap.

When Cecile recovered self-possession, she told in a few brief sentences the result of the interview.

"Well, 'e's got to see me yet, Cecile. 'E isn't a caged lion that I can't face 'im."

"'The Madame' must not—indeed, you must not, ma mère. It is so the Beeshop say that it can nevaire be. The peoples they would not forget, they would nevaire forgive Edrique."

"The people, indeed!" and "the Madame" bristled. "My gracious! the people. What 'ave they got to do with it? Better mind their own business, indeed!"

"'The Madame' must promise me, truly she must. It is that I am not such as Edrique may make the marriage for—but so it is I have la fierté—what you call her—the pride, eh?"

"What between pride and Bishops, my little girl, you're in a fair way to spoil Edric's life. Now you be sensible, and let me manage this business."

"Non ! non ! Madame ma mère. Truly you must promise me, as I say—you must promise ! It is so with us, my father and me, we stick together always. It is not for shame that I should hide it from——"

"Eh ?" "The Madame" failed to catch the whispered words.

"The—the leetle childrens what would come. So Milord Beeshop said it."

"The brute—'e did ?" and "the Madame" flared red as the hibiscus blossom. "As if your little ones wouldn't be as good as the Queen's any day. Casting it up at them to the third and fourth generation. Oh, my ! and Bishops call themselves Christians, do they ? Thank God ! Mary Ann Dubois ain't that kind of Christian. You just stay 'ere, Cecile—now, child, don't you try to keep me ; I'm going to give 'im a bit of my mind and see 'ow 'e'll like it."

"Oh, Madame, I pray you not—it will make me to the ground with shame. It will—indeed it will. You have been so ver' good to me—so ver' good, you will not make me fall for shame. I have make the promise to Milord Beeshop."

"What, Cecile, you 'ave promised 'im to give up Edric ?"

"It is for Edrique—so that the peoples will not make the life all desolate for him. See you, ma mère, it is thus I could not be the happiness to him—not the happiness we speak of all two, we speak

of all the time. Milord Beeshop he say that it would be nevaire for happiness for Edrique—nevaire!”

“Stuff!” said Madame scornfully. “Stuff! what does ’e know about it? ’E’s just clean forgotten ’e was ever young, that’s about it. As though them marriages of inconvenience they talk of meant ’appiness to any real live ’uman being. Stuffed figures they may be, but ’uman beings—no!”

“Then ‘the Madame’ she promise?” and Cecile took her hands in hers and looked up at her pleadingly. “It is not that she should put me to the great shame!”

Madame pressed her hands in the impulse of affection, and gave a sigh of bewilderment. “It isn’t for me to say, my little girl, what may be the workings of the ’uman ’eart in foreign parts, but for the life of me I don’t see no shame about it. It seems to me, Mary Ann Dubois, a plain-spoken woman, and thinking as my godfathers and godmothers did for me, whatever that may be—that you and the old Bishop ’ave got things so mixed up that it wants a plain-spoken person to just set them right and put them straight. The Bishop’s got to see things in a sensible way, and I’m the woman to make ’im do it, Cecile. No, my little girl, I can’t give you no promise; and I just can’t do it because I love you as if you were my own little girl that never came—and I won’t see your life and Edric’s ruined for all the Bishops in Aus-

tralia." She rose resolutely, still holding the girl's hands in hers.

"Cecile, when you were brought 'ere by Dubois, a sick, worn-out girl with nothing to say for yourself, I took to you straight off and trusted you. I took to you more and more every day—it seemed to me that God, in the round-about way He does some things in, 'ad sent you to be for my little girl. Then when I knew all the story, and 'ow you had stuck by your father through thick and thin, as the saying is, I loved you all the more. I knew God 'adn't put wickedness in a 'eart like that, true and faithful through all them dreadful days. You are right in the middle of my 'eart, Cecile, and it's a biggish sort of one, as Dubois can tell you; and I'm just going to fight for you as if I'd borne you out of my own flesh—my own little girl. Now, dear, don't you go trying to make me promise; I know you love the old Madame, I know it—I've known it and thanked God for it this many a day. Now you go to your room and leave me and the Bishop to fight it out."

"Oh, Madame! it is out of the love you have of me you do it, I see truly, but you understand not, you nevaire understand what it is to me. Oh! it is the shame you will make for me! It is so I love Edrique that I make the promise—so Edrique will see I have so great love for him, I will not make all desolate his life by the marriage."

"That may be the French way, Cecile, but it

isn't the English, and I'm going to 'ave it out with the Bishop. You, Mary there! You go make some tea for Miss Cecile. Now go to your room, child, and I'll come and tell you all about it when we've 'ad it out. No, I won't, Cecile—I won't promise. I can't—there!"

Cecile, humiliated beyond further protest, went listlessly to her room. She seemed to tingle with a physical sense of shame. This great obtuse loving soul was, out of her love, going to undo all that she, Cecile, had schooled herself with infinite pain to do—to make a sacrifice of her own life in proof of her love for Edric. Madame—the mother-soul who had drawn so close to her—was going to wound her in the very heart of pain. She felt her face flame as she thought of what father and son, the son whose kisses on her lips had been the pledges of his faith in her, would think. Oh, dear God! just for him to think that she was such a common, brazen thing, to try and hold him to her when she knew what it must mean to him; for him to think that she thought only of herself, of her own life and ease and gain—that what it cost him was nothing to her, nothing to her at all. She had given him all the pure deep love that filled her heart, and he had taken it as if it were a gift from the bon Dieu; now he would see it a mean, tarnished thing, a wicked woman's trick to win a home for herself at any cost. She threw

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herself on the bed beset with a mental pain intenser than the physical one.

What happened in the drawing-room was known only to Madame and the Bishop, but the latter bade a formal farewell to his hostess immediately after the interview, leaving a polite formal message for his host, who had been called to the mill.

As he went down the bank leading to the river-side he raised his hat and wiped his forehead, and there was that in the set face of the Bishop which becomes not Bishops who have chastened the passions of frail humanity by years of meditation on holy things.

As "the Madame" returned from the hall door along the broad passageway, she was met by the Mary who had been instructed as to the service of tea.

"Little Missie she go walk. Big fellow sick head b'longa her."

Madame nodded—it was no wonder the poor child had a headache—and turned into her retreat, sinking with a great sigh of relief to her chair. "I'll never let that man confirm me, never—if I 'ave to die and risk it—never!"

CHAPTER XXIX

“**S**HE sent this message by you, sir—Cecile sent it?” They were seated on the verandah of Edric’s quarters. With mutual forbearance the topic of the Bishop’s interview had been postponed till after the evening meal. Perhaps each in his heart welcomed the brief respite, and trusted to the soothing influence of the after-dinner smoke for fuller confidences.

“I put the position to her fully, frankly and I believe honestly; you know my meaning—one may be dishonest unwittingly. I spoke to her as I speak to you, and tried to put all pride aside. She is, I confess at once, a girl of refinement—not at all what I expected, not at all. But that makes it none the less impossible.”

“I thought, father, from—well, from your manner rather than your words, last night, that perhaps after all you would view it differently.”

“If momentarily I gave any suggestion of a possibly different view of the matter I regret it, Edric. It must have been momentarily only. Perhaps it was the pity of it touched me for the moment. But you must see how impossible it is.”

"I see nothing impossible in it—nothing. But you said she sent this message by you—that seems impossible. Why, sir, she—she couldn't do it—she could not do anything so da—so desperately cruel."

"You do not doubt my word, Edric?"

"No, sir, of course not that—but I simply cannot realise it. I cannot indeed!"

"She released you from your promise unconditionally—for your own sake—and for mine."

"For my sake! God pity her poor little soul. For my sake!"

"For your sake—and for mine, your father's."

"You told her that?"

"I did. It was a duty I owed to you, and myself."

"You couple us closely together, sir, you and me. Is it fair, father? I know all I owe to you—everything from my childhood till to-day. I want to do what's square, dad," and the loose colloquial words had a pathos of their own. "I mean a fair thing between us, sir. Just a fair thing—but is this fair? You do not know what she is to me, what we are to each other—surely you cannot realise that."

"I believe you love her deeply, but there are duties we owe to one another that go deeper still."

"You do not mean that you are driving me to choose between you, my father, and Cecile? Surely duty does not go as far as that."

"Edric, through all your life I never laid a blow

on you. I held to win you by love. There was no compulsion in all your childhood. It was love always."

"It was, sir!"

"Your mother and I made many sacrifices for you, for your education, for travel, for a share of the world's best things. You were our only child, and every self-denial for you was but sacrificial incense to our love. You believe that—you know it?"

"I do!"

"Now after all these years I ask this one sacrifice from you, that you will not sully your mother's name and mine by marriage to a woman with such a history—not hers personally, perhaps, but of the family—and as far as the world goes it differentiates little, if at all, in such matters between person and person. We—we take some pride, good wholesome pride, in a clean family record."

"It doesn't count much here. It is a blessed thing in this country—a blessed thing—that we take men for what they are—not what their granddads were. It is a blessed thing—a thing to thank God for!"

"When you do that, Edric, you take away the father's pride, his honour before the face of his child. Have you not such regard of your mother and myself? Does all your pride lie in yourself? Have you none in us?"

"Need you ask, sir!"

"You have—as you would wish your children to have—pride in you and their mother?"

"Love is more than pride, father. Pride is nothing by the side of love; love is the beginning and the end of the family and all else."

"That is my answer, Edric; you have given it to me in your own words. I ask it not of pride, since you will not have it so, but of love. For the mutual love in our home, for the love of father, mother, and son knit together, I ask you to give up the idea of this marriage."

There was a long painful silence between them, then the son rose as if the inert attitude were no longer bearable.

"I cannot do it, father! Anything else in the wide world you ask of me I will do at your bidding. But sacrifice Cecile—no! Even if I did not love her for the sake of her own dear self, yet I could not do what you ask. If it were only a love born of pity, pity for a woman so cast away in the world without a friend——"

"She has Madame Dubois," interposed the Bishop drily. "A vehement friend."

"But it isn't pity, sir. It is sheer love between us—something you do not seem to grasp."

"Are you so sure of that on her part?"

"I would stake my soul on it."

"I did not mean to tell you this, but it is worse with you than even I thought."

"Tell me what?"

"Last night after this girl had given me her promise—as I believed it then the earnest promise of a truthful woman that she would release you, go out of your life—she left the room. She appears to have gone direct to this combative friend, Madame Dubois, and told her everything, and between them they plotted a grand stroke, as they thought. Madame Dubois saw me and in her—her way, attempted to undo all this girl had done. I went over the weary business with her again, and the—the creature became positively abusive. I trust I shall never again suffer the humiliation of such a tirade."

"You do not understand 'the Madame,' sir, that is all. She's the most loyal, the dearest old soul in the place."

"Let us agree to differ about that," said the Bishop somewhat icily. "But the reading on the wall in this matter is very clear to me. I was certainly impressed by the girl at our interview, and spoke to her, as I have said, quite frankly, indeed as, for the time being, between equals. Now I see that underneath this well-acted, admirably-acted innocence, there was a subtlety of which I had no breath of suspicion. The girl played on me to win my sympathy, touch my emotions, believing that I would not, could not, accept the complete sacrifice she offered. When the venture overleaped itself she set on her dragon to undo the mischief she had wrought. Can't you see, boy? Can't you see?"

"I can only see that this subtlety is your own invention! Cecile could not be subtle in that way. It simply is not possible."

"I'll put it plainly to you and have done. Here is a girl homeless, sullied in name, without a penny of her own, seemingly an idle dependent on a foolish, vulgar old woman. What has she to gain by marriage with you? Why, everything—shelter, home, money, a clean name. Are you struck blind by this calf love?"

The hot blood surged into Edric's face, and his lips trembled as they held back the passionate words that pressed for utterance. He put his pipe in his mouth and bit the stem.

"Good-night, sir," and he held out his hand.

The Bishop looked up in astonishment. "Good-night! What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can't trust myself—that's all. Let me go, sir, please let me go," and he held out his hand again.

"She has released you, Edric—give me your promise to release her also."

"No, by Heaven I won't! I'll follow her to the world's end but I'll have her for my own. You just played on her love for me—you said it would be ruin to me—that's what you said—you asked her to let me go for your sake—yours and mine. If you weren't my father—I—I could——"

"Edric, for God's sake stop!" and the Bishop rose with command in his gesture.

His son stood there in the half light of the closing day—panting as if with some great exertion, his face lit with passion. The Bishop, a wave of agony beating at his heart, saw himself as he stood one night long ago, passion-filled to the brim of his cup of life.

They stood there in silence, turning away from each other as if ashamed at the lapse into primitive unrestraint. And as each sought within himself for the lost rein of self-control, their eyes wandered across the placid scene before them—the day's work done, the peace of night brooding over scrub, woodland and river. Far out against the violet-tinted skyline on the breast of the river they saw the sail of a boat, white as a dove's wing, making for the open sea beyond.

"Good-night, sir. I—I am sorry——"

"Good-night, Edric," but the Bishop's eyes looked beyond the proffered hand.

CHAPTER XXX

WHEN Cecile reached her room she had but one thought in her mind, a thought that burned into her brain consuming all other thoughts. It was not a calmly determined course of action, but the impulse from an intolerable wound to her womanly pride. Woman the pursuer had no place in Cecile's simple scheme of life. She had given her love to Edric absolutely, but at his seeking; now she would stand before him in the shameful light of an intrigante, the meanest of her sex, the prostitute woman who sold herself for pieces of money and a home. It was intolerable. Escape! escape! It was the consuming thought. She must go away. Life for her here, in the home that had become so dear to her, at the side of the woman who had given her a mother's love with the sense of a divine gift, was no longer possible.

With almost feverish haste she gathered together such clothes as she could take, and laying them out, discarded the pretty feminine things "the Madame" had lavished on her, taking only the plainest, the least costly, and with them the little gatherings of her "allowance." Now in the new light

that had come to her, her setting in the scene of the past year of her life was plain. She was not of "the people," those of whom the Bishop spoke, but outside them. She had no place in the world. What was she here but a dependent coming out of darkness for awhile to linger in the light of a love-lit home to go hence—whither? Where had she hidden her pride? Had "the Madame" killed it with the love she gave her? She must go out and work. By the labour of her hands she must live—or if there were no work for her to do then she must die—but the things of yesterday were not possible to-day. How blind she had been! Now all the world, this little world about her, would see her as the Bishop saw her, as the dear old Madame would make her in his eyes—and in Edric's eyes. God was her witness. He would know she gave her love to Edric as true love gives itself, without thought of gain, or rest, or home—only for dear love's sake. She could live, she was strong, she could pinch and fight, the woman's fight—till the good God took her to His rest. She would take what was needed from "the Madame's" bounty to start her on her fight, she would take what was needed, only that—and without thought of repayment. One could not repay "the Madame;" there were debts beyond repayment. She dare not, could not, wound the old heart so.

Time pressed. Even "the Madame" could not prolong the interview beyond its reasonable limits.

Cecile had no time to write, and also it was so difficult to write this English, so stiff and hard beside the dear mother-tongue she had learned with her baby lips. Still she would leave a word or two, and on a sheet of note paper she pencilled:

"My mother, it is for the love of you and Edric I can no longer stay, my mother."

She put the little message on her toilet table, then kissed the dainty frilled pillow of her bed where her head had rested so many a night in dreams. Bundle in hand she went out of the house, leaving her excuses with the round-eyed Mary, who in dumb stolidity saw her make a circuit of the garden to avoid the outlook from the drawing-room windows.

Cecile went to the little jetty where the boat was tied under the shelter of an overhanging tree. The boat craft she had learned from Cacalouch had stood her in good stead. It was Edric who had said she could handle the skiff and its bit of a sail as well as any man upon the river. She rowed the boat under cover of the high bank till the bend of the river brought her in sight of the open way. The air was motionless. Securing the skiff to the branch of an overhanging tree she rested till a breeze came with the setting of the sun. Then she hoisted the little sail, and sped out on the broad stream, the musical ripple of cut water against the bow bringing all the happy days of the life she was leaving in a mist to her eyes. The light westerly

wind carried her before it. She never turned her head, she could not bear to do so, but watched the eastern sky blanch out its tints of rose and violet, pale sisters of the flaming west behind her. Through the gossamer curtains of the brief twilight she saw the stars peep out—night came, and through the silence her ears caught the familiar sound of the surf on the crescent beach, the beating of God's heart—for her, for all.

At the river's mouth, where the sand bar broke the ocean swell, she brought her boat alongside the sapling jetty, and taking her bundle crossed the sand hills to the hut where the fishermen lived. Their nets were spread out to dry, and they themselves were smoking in the silent preoccupation of their kind. She explained that the boat was to be returned to "Mon Repos." The men knew her well, and treated her with courtesy. She was going South—a boat was due that night, was it not so? Well, one was due; but the lady understood the ways of these coastal boats, did she not? It might be that night, it might be to-morrow! She sat on the sand a little removed from them, her bundle at her side. "Was the lady's luggage coming on in the tender?" one ventured. No, she had all with her. Then they lapsed again into silence—broken at length by Cecile. Would it be possible for Messieurs the fishermen to put her on board the steamer? She did not wish to go in the tender. She had reasons. Messieurs the fishermen would do

much more for the lady—but they were poor men. She allayed their fears of any lack of due reward.

So when the first keen eye caught the masthead light of the steamer up the coast they put out their boat. The beacon light was lit, and its ruddy flicker on the water fell between them and the shore. Whilst the steamer, to-night ahead of time, waited the coming tender, they were hailed from the fishermen's boat, and Cecile went aboard with her suspiciously small encumbrance of luggage. However, a passenger was a passenger, and half an hour later Cecile, in the security of her cabin, heard the tender come alongside. She strained her ears to catch a familiar voice, fearful lest her going had been noted. There were few passengers, and their transport was speedily effected. The tender cast off, the screw revolved, and Cecile went South.

"The Madame" waited patiently till the gong was sounded for the evening meal. Dubois returned as the clamour ceased. Then "the Madame" inquired about Cecile. She had not yet returned "Poor child!" she murmured, "'aving it out all alone! I know what that means. She'll be 'ere presently, Dubois. You get along with your tea. I'll wait a bit and tell you all the news as you eat." So whilst Dubois had his meal, she told him the events of the day. Dubois finished and was filling his pipe. "The Madame" inquired again. It was getting dark, but Cecile had not yet returned. Then it suggested itself to her that perhaps the girl

had returned without being observed and was in her room. She went there but found it vacant. Standing in the dim light "the Madame" had an intuition that the room "felt strange," as she described it, so lighting a candle she looked about her and from little indications of disarrangement became apprehensive. Then she saw the note on the toilet table, and with a spasm of superstition blew out the light as she took it in her hand.

The old Madame sat in the darkness on the edge of the bed, and fumbled the note. She sat there for a minute or two with an odd sense of faintness and removal, not thinking of anything, but hearing herself as if it were some other person breathing in short, quick breaths.

"Marie, my angel, where are the matches?" It was the voice of the unconcerned Dubois, and it sounded as if it were quite a long distance away.

"Mary Ann Dubois, you ain't yourself. Get up! get up!" she expostulated with the seated figure. Then Mary Ann Dubois got up, feeling dazed and desperately lonely.

"All right, Sherry, I'm coming. Yes, I'm——"

Dubois looked up at the break in her voice, and saw "the Madame" at the door of the dining-room with the slip of white paper in her hand, and a face as white as the paper.

"Marie!"

"All right, Sherry—don't you mind me. I've

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been took a little. Let's sit down, Sherry. I ain't got my spectacles. You read it."

Dubois took the paper from her and read it.

" 'My mother,' " repeated "the Madame" slowly—" 'my mother.' "

Then Dubois rose, and gently turned the key in the door lest any eye but his should see her grief.

CHAPTER XXXI

DOCTOR THIBAULD stood at the door of the French Consulate in Sydney with a frown of annoyance on his face; the Doctor's mobile face was capable of indicating all phases of emotion. Two years ago, after a long period of service in the convict settlement at New Caledonia, he had taken extended leave of absence. After a year of quiet residence among his people in Paris, he had mapped out an itinerary which included travel through England and the Continent. He was in Rome when Cecile's letter, re-directed to him from Noumea, reached his permanent address. It was sent on to Rome, only to be returned thence as he re-entered Paris ahead of it. A few days after the letter came into his hands he received an official communication from the Governor at Ile Nou, enclosing a carefully censored letter from the évadé Bertrand. The Governor in curt official language stated that Bertrand, together with another évadé named Cacalouch, a scélérat of the worst type, had been rescued from an islet off the Queensland coast, taken to Sydney, and thence deported to Noumea. They had made a determined but unsuccessful at-

tempt to escape, taking with them the daughter of the convict Bertrand. She, so far as could be ascertained, had been drowned in a storm that carried the escapés' boat from its moorings. On this point, however, the convict Bertrand was unconvinced; and the enclosed letter was an appeal to have further inquiry made.

The receipt of these letters caused Thibault some distress of mind. He had, early in his acquaintance with her, conceived a liking for Cecile, and his still earlier friendship for her father and assurance of his innocence of the crime with which he was charged, combined to impress upon him a sense of responsibility. The sense was not one he could clearly define, but whilst he was conscious that no direct duty was cast on him in the matter, he could not put aside the earnest appeal of the father. The Doctor fumed and fretted, argued the matter out to his own conviction that it was really no affair of his, and in the end, to calm the insistent voice of a sensitive conscience, determined to curtail his visit by a boat's departure in order to make inquiries concerning Cecile. He was aware from her letter that she was being well looked after at Mon Repos, but that, of course, could be only a temporary asylum. He wrote to both father and daughter, assuring each of the safety of the other. As to the latter, he asked her to write to him at Sydney, stating her then address, so that he might, if possible, with the time at his disposal, reach her. This letter

he addressed under cover to the proprietor of Mon Repos, requesting that it be forwarded to her last known address. This course of action was the outcome of much thought on the part of Doctor Thibault, and to-day, standing at the door of the consulate, he found that in common with many other well-laid plans it had gone "agley." He had given himself the best part of a month for his quest by fitting in the arrival and departure of boats between Sydney and the island. If it were not wholly needed he could fill in the overplus of time agreeably in the beautiful seaport capital.

"What the deuce," he exclaimed to himself with irritation, "does an old fool like me want in such a galley as this? It is like looking for a rabbit in a wood. Not a word from the girl. Eh bien! one always forgets something—and that something as obvious as one's nose. I should have told the proprietor of this Mon Repos plantation to write also if Cecile were not there. The imbecile! he might have thought of it for himself. This place—where is it?" and he turned back to make inquiry as to the distance and the dates of outgoing coastal steamers. He found that he could catch a northward bound steamer on the following day. The alternative of writing had suggested itself, but if the reply were unsatisfactory or vague, so much good time would have been lost, and he would be no nearer his object. After all he would get an idea of this great English settlement, as the vessel called at the ports

on the way. Once there he would be able to trace the girl's movements if, as he supposed must be the case, she had long since left Mon Repos. It might be difficult, but the Doctor's spirits only rose at the prospect of encountering and overcoming obstacles. After all it was but the action of a man and a true friend to do this thing for the unhappy Bertrand. Truly one owed something to friendship.

Doctor Thibauld, in common with the greater number of long service officials in the French Colony, spoke English with comparative fluency. For many years the island had been a retreat for defaulting debtors, commercial derelicts and their kind from the Australian mainland. There also not a few Englishmen, interested in coffee-growing, cattle-raising, and in the exploitation of the nickel and cobalt mines, had made their homes. At the Cercle de Noumea there was a noticeable proportion of English members. The Doctor had, therefore, no difficulty in so far as the impediment of a foreign language is concerned, for impediment it would have been in a land that had all the insular complaisance of its race in the one and only language.

Experienced traveller though he was, and accustomed to the rude hospitality of the sparsely settled parts of the French settlement, he viewed with suspicion the accommodation offered him at the "hotel" in the embryo township at the junction of the river branches, where the tender landed him on the

night of arrival at his destination. The bar of the galvanised iron shanty was filled with a motley crowd of frequenters; "poison," as the ardent spirits served out to customers were frankly dubbed, "euchre" and "sugar politics," the never-ending discussion of white against black labour, making the crude interests of the place. The sleeping accommodation was a series of stalls with partitions to the cross beams, and the night he spent in one of these so-called rooms was to the Doctor an evil one that he recalled afterwards as filled with prodigious snoring and protesting profanity, punctuated by an occasional boot heaved at the thin iron partition near some arch offender's head. The morning spectacle of a group of men with ague-shaking hands lifting doses of "fever mixture" to their lips accelerated his departure for Mon Repos. The landlord's son, a lanky red-headed youth whose raiment was of the scantiest, pulled him across the river to the landing-place. Thence he found his way to the mill, and introduced himself to Dubois. His delight at meeting a compatriot almost compensated for the miseries of the sleepless night. He gladly accepted an instantaneously proffered hospitality. In the little office at the mill the Doctor explained his mission, and learned all the salient facts in the year's history of Cecile's residence at Mon Repos.

"'The Madame,'" said Dubois, "has been inconsolable since her departure, and as for me," with

an expressive shrug of the shoulders, "it is like, mon ami, as if indeed we had lost a daughter. Your letter arrived, but we knew not where to send it."

"This young man, Edric. You say he has followed her?"

"He and his father, the Bishop—these priests are like women for making trouble—caught the next boat. They preserve well the relations, these English; but one could see—yes, one could see the woman was between them. Truly, M'sieur, the woman is always at the parting of the ways! Is it not so?"

The Doctor nodded assent. "You have had no news of her?"

"None! Not one word, and 'the Madame' feels it the more—still as I have said to her repeatedly, 'The girl may think it best to leave us so. Thus she came into our lives as it were out of the night, and so she leaves us.' The working of a woman's mind—comment! You are not married? Ah, well, it will not be so clear to you as to us who are married. God makes many wonders—not the least is a woman's mind."

"You think this young M'sieur had the design to seek for his fiancée?"

"Edric Perivale will seek her to the world's end."

"Good!" said the Doctor laconically. "I like such quality in a lover—though as for myself one

woman is as good as another, and they trouble me but little."

"You are not for the marriage, my good Doctor? Eh bien! it is not the same with all of us. As for me I am content; 'the Madame' is a good wife, not such as these little ones without care for a man's comfort. Not so, indeed! I have no liking for the useless prettiness; for me it is substance and good sense and some provision of money that have account."

"Truly!" assented the Doctor with a sagacious elevation of the brows.

Doctor Thibault was speedily introduced to "the Madame" and installed as a guest at the bungalow. The old woman's simplicity of nature and her evidently deep-rooted affection for Cecile appealed to him at once. From her he learned a wealth of detail in the story.

"Cecile isn't an ordinary girl," said "the Madame." "She's just as proud as a Duchess—and you can't take 'er on any terms but 'er own. And, Doctor, though that girl 'as seen things as would dirt most women with the seeing of them, wickedness beyond wickedness, she's got a soul as clean as a daisy. There ain't any dirt stuck to her, and the way she fights for that father of hers—who may be the dreadfulest old rep for all I know——"

"No, Madame, not so; though this 'rep' I do not quite understand; he is a good man, and as Cecile says, so I believe most truly, an innocent one."

"Well, that is as it may be, Doctor; I don't know; but she's as loyal to 'im as a soldier of the Queen."

"This English Bishop——"

"As to 'im, language fails me when I think of 'im. The things 'e said to me, being in my own 'ouse and simply taking that poor girl's part—well, I don't want to talk of it. If the greatest of these is charity, well, I'm not up to it, perhaps not being confirmed."

The Doctor was a little bewildered. "This Monseigneur, then, he forbade the marriage?"

"He would not consent on no account. He was just as obstinate as one of them Christian martyrs at the stake."

"And Cecile?"

"She would not 'ave a marriage without 'is consent."

"Of course, in my country the consent of the parent is more than with you—still——"

"Oh, no! she wouldn't budge not an inch. She'd got an idea that if she wasn't took equal, it would be like saying she was ashamed of 'er father. She always 'stickit' by him, as she said, poor dear lamb!"

"I must see this Bishop. He may know something of Cecile—perhaps the young man, his son, has already found her?"

"No; I think Edric would let me know if 'e 'ad.

We were always good friends, me and 'im, and 'e knows what me and Cecile were to one another."

"Madame has been very good to her—indeed, as a mother."

"She called me 'mother,' " said "the Madame" simply, and looking down set to rubbing her spectacles with a corner of her apron.

"I shall go on to-morrow, with Madame's permission, and see him. If for nothing else I should see him to put Bertrand's case before him as he told it to me. If he is convinced that he is an innocent man he may consent."

"The Madame's" face wore an expression of dubiety indicated by her pursed lips. "What I 'onestly believe is that the Bishop don't care 'arf so much about 'is being innocent or not as the look of things. With them sort of people it isn't so much the realness of things as 'ow it looks to other people. 'E couldn't stomach 'is son marrying a convict's daughter, rightly a convict or wrongly a convict don't matter. It's just the gaol blocks it."

"Nevertheless he shall know the truth—as on my sacred word, Madame, I believe it to be the truth."

CHAPTER XXXII

THE Bishop held the card in his hand. "Thibauld? Thibauld? A physician. Did he state his business with me?"

The maid who had brought the Doctor's card to the Bishop had received no message beyond the expression of a wish to see him.

"Very well, I shall see him. Tell Miss Perivale I shall be engaged for a little while. It is a rather late hour for a visitor."

"Yes, sir. Shall I show the gentleman in here?"

"Yes, Mary. It is probably some pressing matter of business;" and as the girl retired he turned the wick of his reading lamp a little higher. It was a large room, study and library combined, and in the centre of the floor space stood an ample writing-table whereon were set out with methodical neatness the Bishop's writing materials and books of reference, the clergy list, the Postal Guide and so on, for his work as the administrator of so scattered a diocese as that of Capricornia was no light business.

The Bishop rose as the opening of the door heralded the entrance of his visitor.

"The gentleman to see you, sir." The democratic tongue of the Australian maid could not compass the courtesy title of his Lordship.

"You wish to see me?"

"I have taken the liberty, Monseigneur, to call on you with reference to a matter of, I fear, some delicacy."

"Will you take this chair? Let me remove the lamp a little. The glare in one's eyes is not pleasant. You said, I think, 'a matter of some delicacy?' "

"I feel, indeed, that some apology is necessary on my part, but perhaps the best I can proffer is that I am moved by the strong sense of justice to a very dear friend and his daughter."

The Bishop inclined his head with a suggestion of deferential acquiescence. Doubtless this was but one of the many little domestic troubles for which his spiritual consolation and advice were sought. The Bishop's ear was a confessional not mentioned in the rubrics of his church, but none the less resorted to.

"I may have to trespass on your time to make clear the whole affair, but Monseigneur will extend to me his consideration doubtless."

"I am at your service, sir. As it happens I have no special call on my time to-night."

"To begin at the beginning. My friend and I first became closely associated in our friendship

through a great kindness he did me. Such an act as one does not forget."

"His name—I do not think you mentioned it."

"Bertrand—Ernest Bertrand. Doubtless the name will suggest to you some explanation for this visit. I see it is so!"

"You mentioned a daughter. Am I to understand that your friend was the father of Mademoiselle Cecile Bertrand?"

"She is his only child."

"Is it concerning her you wish to speak to me?"

"Of her and of my friend, her father. To put it all short, I wish to place the facts of her father's crime—that is to say, Monseigneur, the crime of which he was accused, and for which he suffers a terrible punishment, but of which he is indeed innocent—these facts I wish to place before you."

"And why, Doctor Thibault?" and the Bishop as he spoke consulted the card before him.

The abrupt interrogation momentarily disconcerted the Doctor. He hesitated with delicate distaste at an equally abrupt declaration of his intervention in affairs with which he had no direct concern.

"As I have said, the act is one of justice as of friendship."

"May I ask if you are an intermediary on Mademoiselle Bertrand's behalf?"

"Non! non! It is not in that light I desire

Monseigneur to regard my intrusion. It is as an act of justice by one man to another."

"Perhaps, as Monsieur proceeds, his reason for this interview may become clearer to me than it is at present;" and the Bishop's voice, though moving on the plane of courteous intonation, had in it an undertone of somewhat supercilious resentment.

The Doctor determined to make his point as speedily as possible.

"Ernest Bertrand was found guilty under evil circumstances. Briefly they were these: His life with his wife had been unhappy; they went apart through her wickedness; he desired to keep secret from his young daughter what the mother had been. He, therefore, led her to believe of her mother all that was most excellent, most virtuous. To secure for himself the love and fidelity of this daughter was the one object of his life. In the possession of the murdered man were letters from the wife, which, utterly false and vile, would have come to the daughter—had she read them—as the voice of the dead mother demanding vengeance for a life of cruel wrong by the father. Such was it! He——"

"The murdered man?"

"The murdered man had made poor Bertrand pay through the nose for each of these letters. Thus he paid that the mind of his young daughter should not be poisoned against him—for she loved him, Monseigneur, with an intense loyalty that was in-

deed a religion. It is to be remembered that he gave his life for her, that they were by circumstances cast upon each other in a manner quite exceptional. Bertrand was a man of such sensibilities that, having greatly suffered through his wife, he withdrew himself from all society. They lived thus together almost wholly. Under such circumstances the mutual love or hate grows fast and deep. Here it was all love. To keep these slanders from her ears, poor Bertrand was drained from week to week. At last it became too much to endure. He determined to make an end of the affair, and went one night to the apartments of this rascal to buy the lot with all the means he had."

"Or failing that to murder him, I suppose?" interposed the Bishop coldly.

"Bertrand had no thought of murder in his heart. He wished to buy this man's silence forever, secure these lying letters, and so end all. But——"

"Yes?"

"Even had he so desired, as you say, to murder him, it was not necessary. Another hand had done it for him. When Bertrand entered Pasquier's apartments that night, he found the man not dead indeed, but dying. It seems that others as well as poor Bertrand had also been thus played upon. He was a rascal of many names. Pasquier was that by which my friend knew him—but there were others. I do not remember them—yes, one I now recall,

indeed he called himself by a title—a title, indeed! What was it now—what was it?" and the Doctor puckered his brow in thought.

"Does it matter? He had many aliases. Well?"

"Pardon! I have a great dislike to let my memory so fail. We physicians have the memory for detail. It does not do to let it grow rusty. Ah—truly! I have recalled it, he was the Marquis, so he made his game, the Marquis de Remusat."

"The Marquis de Remusat!"

"Has Monseigneur heard of this man—this name?"

But the Bishop did not answer, and as the Doctor put his question in innocent surprise, he saw the hands resting on the table—the Bishop's face was in shadow—clasped in a muscular contraction that patched them red and white.

"The Marquis de Remusat!" repeated the voice from the shadow.

"I thought from Monseigneur's exclamation that perhaps he had heard of this man. There is little more to add. Bertrand took the opportunity to secure the letters. These he burned with many others. Unfortunately he was seen from an overlooking window. He had once or twice leant over Pasquier to make examination, for, as I have said, the man was not dead but dying. Indeed it is possible he might have lived—so Bertrand admits. You see I am perfectly open, concealing nothing. These examinations, the burning of the letters, his

leaving the house with secrecy, this and that put together—made such evidence that Bertrand was found guilty—but it was not he who killed the man, not he, but another one who came before. Who he was none knew. Indeed, there was no search for him. It was but a poor defence. But it was true, Monseigneur. There was another man, and Bertrand pays for him.”

“Bertrand pays for him!” echoed the voice from the shadow. The hands had unclasped, and but one now rested on the table with a finger picking at its surface.

The tick, tick of the picking finger punctuated the silence in the room.

“You say,” at length broke in the Bishop—“you say that this man——”

“The murdered man!”

“This man was still alive when your friend entered the room? He was a physician—your friend?”

“Yes! I forgot to say so—doubtless the daughter——”

“She mentioned it. Then——” and here the two hands were united, the fingers pressing each other, the half light falling on the Bishop’s bent head—“then he might have saved him—might, you have admitted it.”

“It is a question difficult to answer.”

“It would be the duty of a physician at least to try—at least to try, Monsieur, would it not?”

"Bertrand was not there as a physician."

"Monsieur avoids the point; he would try—he ought to have tried or, if he did not—if he let him die—then—then the man's death was at his door." The hands were withdrawn from the table, and the Doctor saw the figure in the shadow drawn rigidly upright.

"You have considered the case of Bertrand only. Is not anything to be said of the man who left him for dead—who murdered him?"

"What do you know of that, Monsieur?" and the Bishop's voice thrown upward from the raised head sounded far off.

"Nothing, truly! nothing."

"How can you judge, then?"

Thibault shrugged his shoulders in perplexity.

"Suppose—suppose for the sake of argument—it was a quarrel between them, with no intent, God knows, with no intent to kill!"

Thibault felt a tension of the muscles that drew his relaxed body into momentary rigidity, as the words of invocation, thrust as if by the impulse of an emotion to the surface, caught his ear. He became conscious of a new intensity in the interview. Thereafter the pauses of silence were accentuated.

"I say, Monsieur, if there were no intent. Why should it not be so? Why—why condemn this man unheard?"

"Even so, if—as you say in argument—it was a quarrel, quick, rapid, tout-à-coup, is it not also as

you say of the Doctor Bertrand—the man was not dead, yet this man, this murderer, left him to die?”

“He could not tell. He was not a physician!”

The words slipped out.

“Ah!” and this time it was the clasped hands of Thibauld that rested on the table in the circle of light, as he leant forward, his eyes piercing the shadow beyond. “Then Monseigneur knows this man? It is not possible!”

In the pause that followed, Thibauld’s ear caught the quick breathing of the withdrawn figure that opposed him.

“Monseigneur knows something he will not say.” On the arms of the writing chair, where a glimpse of light overlapped the table, he saw the white hands of the Bishop grip and hold.

“I am not at liberty to tell, Monsieur. The name of the dead man, the circumstances of his death recall a confession made to me—years ago—a confession.”

“Then this man—the murderer—is also dead?”

“What does it matter?”

“What does it matter? Surely you mean not thus. What does it matter? Is it of no matter that an innocent man should suffer these torments, that his child should be as an outcast to honest people? Is it no matter that the justice of Heaven should be defied? No matter—mon Dieu!”

“If he were alive, if I could take you to him, and

put my hand on him and say 'this is the man!' what—what good could it do—now?"

"Monseigneur, I speak as one gentleman to another, and ask you, not as a priest, but as a man—a man of honour, I ask you is that an answer? It is not for me surely to teach the duty in such an affair. If this murderer lives, and knows that Bertrand suffers for his crime, and lets him suffer as 'no matter,' then there is no name too gross for him. As for me, I could with joy tear him to pieces for a poltroon, a coward!"

Thibault rose in the vehemence of his denunciation.

"He never knew. God is his witness—he never knew!" and in the circle of light a white-streaked head rested on the Bishop's hands.

"Then Monseigneur will not tell me all. He knows more of this affair than he will tell me. It may be that he will not betray this man who has confessed to him, that rather he will let the innocent suffer. Ah, well! that is between him and the God he shall make answer to some day, but as for me, Olivier Thibault, if that man and I were to meet I should do the justice of God—without waiting."

But the head of the Bishop rested on his hands as if stricken there, and his tongue was mute.

Thibault remained standing, expectant of an answer.

As he stood thus, half in apprehension at the

prolonged silence, there came a tap at the door. The Bishop raised his head, and leaning back said huskily, "Come in."

Thibault moved aside as a woman entered.

"Frank, it is past eleven—are you not well, dear? I beg your pardon, sir. I was not aware that you were with my brother. He is not a young man nor very strong."

"Pardon, Madame! I regret sincerely."

"Doctor Thibault, my sister! We were too engrossed to mark the time, dear. Good-night, Doctor."

"Good-night, Monseigneur. If you will permit, I shall leave with you my address in Sydney; after that, Noumea will be sufficient. Adieu, Madame, and again my regrets."

The clock in the hall struck midnight, struck one; the oil in the reading lamp burned low, the light almost flickered out.

Then at last they rose and moved to the door, hand in hand, and at the parting the woman put her arm around his neck. "You did it for me, Frank; whatever happens, you did it for me."

CHAPTER XXXIII

AGAIN Doctor Thibauld stood at the door of the French Consulate in Sydney.

The morning following his interview with the Bishop he had written a brief note to him. It conveyed Thibauld's address in Sydney, and requested the address of Edric Perivale as a possible assistance to him in his search for Cecile. To this he had received an equally brief reply. The Bishop regretted that he was unaware of his son's address. No letter had reached him since his departure for the South.

During his return trip to Sydney, the Doctor had ample time to ponder the astonishing disclosure at the interview. He constructed and reconstructed possible links between the Bishop and Bertrand, but had so little material out of which to make them that each was set aside as soon as made. Perplexed and dissatisfied, he in the end found nothing better to go upon than the Bishop's own statement of a confession. Doubtless priests of all religions had many such seamy revelations made to them under the cloak of secrecy. Still this did not content him; there had been that in the Bishop's manner

which said more than words. It was not conceivable that he, the Bishop—pshaw! it was not conceivable, surely not. Yet, but for the interruption—these women, what a pest they were!—he would have probed it to the heart. What in the name of all the saints could bring the Bishop into such a business? Yet a Bishop was born in the ordinary way, and had youth, and it was not only to the woman there was a past. Truly none knew that better than he, Thibault, and he involuntarily shrugged his shoulders. Then the dilemma as to the true murderer tormented him with doubt. It had suited Bertrand well that the man should die, and he let him, for he had confessed he could have saved him. Yet to save such a rascal to be one's own tormentor, was it not too much for human nature? Again it might be, as the Bishop had said of the other man, a sudden quarrel, perhaps a blow struck and a struggle, a thing perhaps justifiable in itself with no intent, so the Bishop had said, no intent to kill. Then Thibault sitting in his deck chair, under the shelter of the awning and in a secluded corner, soared into the realm of metaphysics. What in very truth constituted murder? Was not the intent everything, and with whom did it lie? His knowledge of medical jurisprudence helped but to obscure the issue—but in the end he justified Bertrand, not out of pure reason, but of faithful friendship. Perhaps the cue to the whole affair was in Bertrand's possession, and

he himself had never recognised it. Perhaps—but Thibault in the end gave up the puzzle. It would be well to hear some judge expound it all, and leave one well satisfied—yet still in doubt.

He had interviewed the Consul as to the possibility of tracing Cecile, for he had ascertained, after a round of inquiries at the shipping offices and much searching of passenger lists, that somewhere in Sydney she would probably be found. The Consul had referred him to the head of the police and given him a letter to that public officer.

It was with this letter in hand he now stood at the Consulate door. Oddly enough the question had not before presented itself to him: supposing he found Cecile, what then? To her there could be no alternative. But a return to the island would be a sacrifice of her young life—a fact which in its naked ugliness was almost too repulsive to face. For a moment he contemplated a complete withdrawal from the situation, letting fortune solve for itself the dilemma it had created. Then it struck him that even should he withdraw, how could he answer for young Perivale? A determined man, he would doubtless sooner or later find the girl, communication would be re-established with Mon Repos, and the facts of his visit and the father's fate disclosed. The situation would be still more complicated, and perhaps two young lives instead of one be drawn within the circle of the prison. He determined to go on, to do the plain duty that lay

before him, to seek Cecile, and if he found her to leave the determination in her own hands.

Thibauld found the head of the police prepared to assist him to the extent of his power. He was handed over to a French detective, whose special duty lay in watching the movements of his compatriots in the little French colony established in the city, out of, for the most part, escapés from the convict settlement.

The Doctor, with momentary surprise, learned that the officer was already acquainted with the broad outlines of the story, the escape of the three from the island and their subsequent separation.

"M'sieur is not the first who has sought my assistance to trace this girl—as yet without result. A young man, a M'sieur Perivale, called on me with just such a request as M'sieur now makes. However, this young man was difficult to deal with. The first night we made a tour of such likely places as I know of for an évadé—well, the daughter of an évadé, if M'sieur desires to be precise—for such a one to seek concealment."

"Mademoiselle Bertrand does not need such concealment."

"So said this young man. You are of a pair, you two, eh? Well, as I said, we went to all likely places—but this M'sieur Perivale proved most unreasonable. So much so that in the end I made excuse for withdrawing from the case. What could one do with a young man who became so personal

as to reflect on my discretion in such a matter? It was at every turn, 'It is not possible for her to be here: these are thieves and worse; she would rather die than live with such.' *Comme ça!* But M'sieur is, like myself, a man of the world, eh? He is advanced in years beyond these fancies of youth, is it not so? We shall make a tour of some places to-night."

After dinner at his hotel, where he entertained the officer, they set out on their quest. Passing through cleanly, well-lit thoroughfares they came to a squalid quarter of narrow, pent-in streets, where the doors of evil-looking tenements, they were so suggestive of dirt and its sister crime, opened to the pavement. Along the kerb, groups of men and women squatted to get a breath of the evening air, though here it was pregnant with the sour odours of decay and garbage.

The first house they entered was that of a receiver of stolen goods, who, having completed twelve years of servitude in the island, had re-established his business in Australia.

"This fellow here," explained the detective, "is a clever rascal. We know he is a receiver, but he is too clever—some day we shall have him, but not yet." He called the man by name, and when Thibault saw him it was with such feelings as one sees a rat. On his head the hair was cut close to the skin, and on either side of his great eagle-beaked nose were deep, inset, cunning eyes. On such a

M'am'selle as was described to him he had not set those eyes. Perhaps Madame Arreo, who kept the little lollie shop, would know of such a one. On the way thither the officer pointed out a house, now apparently tenantless. "There also lived a receiver—a clever fellow, my faith! He was an expiré, and his wife met him here with some 2000 francs. They took a stall at Paddy's market—the Halles Centrales of this place—and sold the plums, grapes and ice cream—ah! but this little trade was but the cover for receiving stolen goods. In three years they made some 40,000 francs. So they went home to la belle France!"

They turned down a dark lane, and came out in another street similar in respect of meanness and the suggestion of disrepute to the one they had left. Here Madame Arreo kept her little shop and beyond it, at the rear, was the bench of her husband, a burly fellow with matted hair and a chin black with unshorn bristles. He was still at work in an atmosphere redolent of garlic. He had just dined. "This man," said the detective, "is an honest fellow, and a prodigious worker. He was a communist. You remember Rochefort, eh, Arreo?"

"Ah!" said the industrious Arreo, as he planed up a piece of Kauri pine, whose resinous perfume struggled against the prevailing garlic, "Henri Rochefort! Ah! there is a man, indeed!" But neither Arreo nor his wife, a stout pleasant-faced woman who sat placidly in the tiny shop before a

background of bottles containing highly-coloured sweets, had seen or heard aught of Cecile!

"Now, with those people there," commented the detective as they returned to the footpath, "your M'am'selle would have been in good hands. They are enthusiasts and foolish to a degree. That big fellow Arreo is a fine tradesman, but this foolishness of his ends not in talk—else it were better for his pocket. He can save no francs like that other I spoke of. On the contrary, though he can recite pages of Victor Hugo like an actor indeed, he gives away his sous like an imbecile."

Through wine shops and dens they made a dismal pilgrimage till midnight, but without success.

"To-morrow night we will go elsewhere!" was the parting promise of the officer.

"I am afraid—though, as you say, I have some knowledge of the world, such maybe as the young M'sieur had not—for his good, indeed—yet I, too, conceive it is useless to search in such quarters for this girl. She is truly not of this kind at all."

The detective lit a cigarette. "If it is an angel M'sieur seeks, is it not at the Cathedral he should apply? As for me, though I reverence the angels, as a respectable citizen ought to, yet they do not come my way."

"But surely this is not all your little France out here?"

"Oh, no! We have others, but naturally an

évadé—I mean the daughter of such—would seek refuge with like birds, eh?”

“Poor child!” thought Thibault, “the stain of the prison sinks deep. Suppose to-morrow, my friend, we seek among some honest folk. There are some such, you say?”

“But yes—quite a few, indeed. Well, to-morrow night I shall take M’sieur to some honest ones—very honest, very poor, thus!”

The following morning Thibault sent a telegram to the address of Edric Perivale, furnished to him by the detective. He requested an interview at his hotel that afternoon.

Perivale came in complete ignorance of what constituted the business of “an urgent and confidential nature” alluded to in the telegram. The foreign name alone gave him any clue to its possible nature, and inspired in him a vague hope that at last, after many days and nights of fruitless wandering, he might be nearing the end, the conclusion of his quest.

The Doctor briefly narrated to him the circumstances of his visit to Mon Repos, and made a bare reference to the interview with the Bishop.

“My visit to Monseigneur was with one object, to do justice to my friend, the Doctor Bertrand, and his daughter. You love Mademoiselle?”

“I do, M’sieur.”

“And would marry her even were the father guilty?”

"I love Mademoiselle Bertrand for herself."

"Truly, that seems to me the common sense of it all; but Monseigneur, your father, has some ideas quite otherwise. You are a conservative nation, you English. You marry the family to the family, not the woman to the man, eh?"

"It is so with you also—your nation—is it not?"

"Well, perhaps a little so, indeed yes; but here in Australia these things matter not so much. With us in France and England the family is all behind us, but here it is all in front. *Ma foi!* you make your own family here!"

"I wish you could bring my father to that point of view, Doctor Thibault."

"Who knows! He may arrive there in time. But this Mademoiselle is very proud. She may love you, M'sieur Perivale, with all the passion and devotion of a good woman—but behind that is something deeper, the loyalty of the daughter. M'sieur, if it were not so she would not be worthy of your love. There are many such, believe me—many women who deny themselves the love of a man and of children for the parent, and go to the grave in solitude, the long day—so grey, so cheerless, *mon Dieu!* so silent of little voices—ended. It is more of daughters, indeed, than of sons thus—yet there are sons! It is out of the sublimity of Heaven such things come."

"But her father is dead, M'sieur."

"On the contrary—he lives."

"Lives!"

"He and one Cacalouch were taken off an island near the great reef and deported to the prison."

"Does Cecile know this?"

"No! I wrote to her, but the letter arrived after her departure. It is to convey this news to her that I am here, that I, too, am making the search."

"Doctor Thibault, do you know what this will mean? Have you thought of what you are doing?"

"Perfectly."

"M'sieur, you are making wreckage of two lives. Oh! my God! to think of it—to take her back there—there to that place! Do you know all she suffered—can you conceive what it is to a pure, spotless woman to live in such a place, to see the things, to hear the things that she must daily see and hear?"

"Do you think, M'sieur Perivale, that Cecile is such a woman that she could rest content in ease and luxury whilst her father lay yonder? And you—you—what would you think of such a woman, such a wife? Ah! M'sieur, passion is but a flame that leaps and dies—but after it, in the woman at your side there need be something deeper—and if it fails you—if in this woman, when your blood is cool and your senses clear, you find no soul behind her lips and eyes—what then? M'sieur, the little children round you—who cling to you—thinking you the greatest man the good God ever made—you would pledge your life on their devotion, their loy-

alty; then remember as it were with the cold blade of a knife in your heart that their mother left her father to die uncared for in the prison. You are a strong man, M'sieur, one can see it in your bearing; you can do much, bear much, but mon Dieu! I doubt if you could bear that!" The Doctor's words were somehow reminiscent in Edric's ears of words his father had spoken, but expressing a widely different point of view.

"Her father would not demand such a sacrifice."

"What of that? Do you think Cecile would be content with that? It is not for that she is his daughter. No indeed! She is his daughter to sacrifice for him. M'sieur will not comprehend. He is perverse!"

"It is unnatural, it is damnably cruel to take a girl's life—a girl like Cecile—take it and destroy it like that."

"Again M'sieur does not understand. It is not for me, Olivier Thibault, to understand the ways of God—there are so many priests who understand so many different ways—but some things I know, for to us physicians are given many facts; and I never knew a sacrifice, M'sieur, that did not conceive a blessing. Such acts as these make perfume in the world, as if the feet of God trod on sweet herbs. But I beg M'sieur's pardon if for a moment I have been lifted from myself. It is in the cold clear light I would ask him to look at

it. He knows the Mademoiselle Cecile. Does he think it possible for her to make this desertion?"

"But if she never knew—if she still thought her father dead!"

"M'sieur, I have thought it all out. I, too, have regard for Mademoiselle Cecile, but in a different way. I also have my duty to my friend, her father. It is well to be a wife and have children, but it is better to be true to the blood, M'sieur, when the blood demands a sacrifice."

"You do not think of me, M'sieur. I love Cecile with all my heart; there is not a sacrifice the world could ask I would not make for her; father, family, name, everything I possess I would give freely to have her for my wife, to hold her in my arms, to shield her from the world. You will kill my life as you will kill hers. Is it nothing that two should suffer?"

"M'sieur is young—and very sorry for himself."

Edric flushed and looked shamefaced.

"I have no doubt of your affection, your passion," he added kindly, laying his hand on Edric's shoulder; "and if it were possible to overcome all difficulties, none would be happier than I to see you and Cecile joined in marriage, but it is not possible, for she herself will make it impossible. Are you prepared to accept the decision? Will you return to your home, to your father the Bishop, to whom you owe a duty as she owes one to her father? Will

you return to your work—a good manly work, for I have heard of it—will you do all these things if she desires it? So shall I believe you love her truly, deeply.” He paused.

“If Cecile bids me return, then I will return, Doctor Thibault.”

“And you will be no longer sorry for yourself, but be a man and work, and love also—for there is such a love as is perhaps best of all because it has no realisation, no attainment;” and there was a look in the Doctor’s eyes, half humorous, half sad.

Edric held out his hand and faced the Doctor squarely. Thibault pressed the hand in his tenderly, looking as it were into the face of his own dead youth. He also many years ago had made his sacrifices and was not sorry for himself—at least, at least, not often so.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE same night the detective and Thibault, re-enforced by Edric, made a further search, but without avail. The detective's reception of the young man was at first not too gracious, remembering the circumstances of their recent association. Edric, however, confessed freely that he had practically come to the end of his resources. He had planned, and to some extent carried out, a systematic campaign. First he had visited all the city registry offices, then such of the suburban ones as he could trace. He had also made inquiry from associations for the assistance of women without homes, also from the priests of her church—it was possible she had sought a refuge in some conventual establishment—and finally had entered on the compilation of a list of French citizens culled from the directory with the intention of visiting each, a task the magnitude of which appalled even his determination. The recital of his doings warmed the heart of Doctor Thibault towards the young man. Surely here was a practical test of sincerity.

Time was flying, and they seemed no nearer the

end of their task. A few days and the Doctor's furlough would come to an end.

On the third night, however, Fortune dealt more kindly with them. The detective had suggested that they should visit some of the French laundries in the suburbs. Three in the city they had already visited without success.

"There is one I know of some little distance out. A married woman, her husband and two sisters. Such folk as Messieurs would well approve. They have been in the colony not long, first the young couple, and recently the sisters. Shall we go there?"

"Yes! yes!" said Thibauld with a dejected sigh; he was leg-weary and had begun to despair. They took a train to the outlying suburb, and after a walk of a mile or thereabout arrived at a cottage with a drying-ground at the rear—the fact was manifested by the irregular contour of white patches against the dark sky. As they entered the front garden, the perfume of flowers mingled with the hot air that flowed from the open window. The dull thumping of smoothing irons punctuated a cheerful babble of voices. Doctor Thibauld pricked his ears at the familiar sounds of his native tongue. Through the open window they could see the lines, strung from wall to wall, and filled with clothes hung up to air. In one corner a little man in shirt sleeves laboured at a mangle, chattering volubly the while. Two young girls were deftly ironing, a

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third was damping clothes, they could see but her back, and an elder woman held a child in her arms for the perspiring father—Jules of the mangle—to appreciate.

"They are magnificent, truly, the legs of this little one," said Madame, as she impressed a hearty kiss on one of the fat limbs.

"It is well done, Jeanne! He is like the ones with the wings in the altar piece. Here, give me the little man," and the proud Jules caught him from the mother's arms and tossed him up.

"Gardez! Gardez! Jules! You are like the big elephant with the child—he is but a little man yet, eh, mon petit?" But Jules was already seated on a chair, and giving the crowing youngster ride-a-cock-horse.

"A Paris, à Paris, à Paris
Sur un petit cheval gris;
A Rouen, à Rouen, à Rouen
Sur un petit cheval blanc
Au pas, pas, pas—au trot, trot, trot—
Au galop——"

"Comment!" and Jules broke the ride short in its crisis, as he turned abruptly at an exclamation from the girls at the ironing table opposite the open window.

"Some Messieurs!"

One of the girls opened the door from the veran-

dah to the visitors, and as they entered, the girl damping down the clothes turned, and for a moment stood motionless; then, as if shrinking from observation, returned to her task, bending over it as if thus to divert attention from her presence.

"This is the Doctor Thibauld, Madame Audrain, and this M'sieur Perivale. Jules, the husband of Madame—her sisters, Messieurs," said the detective with an introductory flourish.

"Ah, Madame! you have a visitor. Another sister, eh? What a family."

"No, M'sieur, this Mademoiselle here is but a friend, a dear friend. Cecile, these Messieurs——" Madame uttered an exclamation as the girl sank on her knees. "My child, what is it?"

"Permit me, Madame, I am a physician—perhaps the Mademoiselle has a syncope from the heat of the room." He had caught a glimpse of her face when momentarily she had turned, and knew that the search was at an end. The Doctor bent over her, and whispered, "Compose yourself, Cecile. It is I, the Doctor Thibauld." Then he lifted the fainting girl to a chair whilst Madame sent Jules, who had deposited the infant in a basket of clothes, post haste for cool water from the tap, and herself fanned the girl's face with her apron.

Edric stood apart, jealously helpless in the midst of these offices of tendance. It was Cecile! The same sweet face a little drawn, a little darker about the eyes, a little fagged in its lines, but Cecile's

face. A wave of compassion swept through him. Was this standing apart from others typical of the future? Was he to let her go, could he let her go out of his life thus—into the nether world of crime? The spirit of the remote past moved in him, the spirit that still moves sluggishly in the blood of later days. He felt as they must have felt who rode out and, capturing their wives, carried them back in the tense grip of the stronger animal. The impulse was almost irresistible to thrust them away, to take her, hold her, keep her close to him, close on his breast with her face nestled to his neck.

But civilised man conquered. He stood aside and waited.

When she had sufficiently recovered, the Doctor, who throughout treated Edric as an inconsiderable factor, suggested that she should retire to her room. Resting on his arm, and assisted by Madame Audrain, she accepted the advice without a murmur. There she lay listlessly on her bed, in the little room which reflected the exquisite cleanliness of its associations, too inert to do more than faintly return the kindly pressure of the Doctor's hand in which her own rested.

"To-morrow, my child, I shall come for you, and we shall go out into the open air again. My little one, this caged life, like a poor bird, is not for such as you. There are some whom storm and wind hurt not, but who wither like a cut flower within the four walls of a work-room. You might

hoe in a field, Cecile, and be none the worse for it, indeed the better for it; but to work all day in such an atmosphere as this——”!

“My father?” They were the first words she had spoken.

“He was rescued, is well, and waits you!” She turned on her side, and hid her face from him.

“Now I shall leave you till to-morrow. Good-night, Cecile; and remember to-morrow we shall go into the air, down by the seaside. Think of it, my little one! Is it not good?”

As he reached the door he heard her call to him as in a whisper, “Doctor!” He returned to the bedside. “Doctor, you are very good to me. I want to say the one word——” She held his hand and looked up into his face with the wistful eyes of a child.

“What is it, *ma petite*?”

She drew him down to her, “Edrique?”

“Not to-night, *chérie*, not to-night!” She still held his hand as if reluctant to accept the answer, and looking at her face he saw it so filled with love and supplication, that he withdrew his eyes lest he should fail in resolution.

“To-morrow! You must obey the Doctor, eh?” Returning to the work-room he questioned the loquacious Jules as to the circumstances under which Cecile had become an inmate of the home, and stated the difficulty they, he and Edric, for with tactful consideration he drew the latter into the

conversation, had had in discovering her hiding-place.

"It was a simple matter indeed, Messieurs. Simple beyond words. We have the washing for many ships to do, and one day when I arrived at a vessel to take away the linen, who should come to me but this M'am'selle with the stewardess; and she being a stranger and a compatriote, what more natural than that she should come to our home till such time as she might have knowledge of the city? Madame my wife has a big heart for all such young creatures of our country. It is not the first time I have thus arrived home, and always to find a welcome. As to this one, she had such in her as went to Madame's heart, and so she has remained with us. She is a good girl—but it is not with everyone that this work agrees. As for me, by the grace of God, I am at the mangle but for some hours in the evening; else I had long been as this M'am'selle—for so much steam takes the life out of a man. For my part it is the growing of cabbages would suit me best—but Madame my wife says she cares not for cabbage soup all her days, and we do well at this business—though, indeed, the sorting out of women's lingerie is in the nature of humiliation for a man. Still, what would you? There is good money here."

The simplicity of the matter was the cause of much chagrin to Edric. It put the elaborate scheme of his great search in a ludicrous light. Still he

was not to blame. The vessel had gone on its way South when he arrived, and weeks would elapse before she touched the port again on her return.

The Doctor arranged to call for Cecile the following day, and then her future course would be determined.

Thibault and Edric were preoccupied with their thoughts on the journey homeward. The presence of the detective, who had withdrawn to the verandah during the latter part of the interview, put constraint on any confidential conversation.

At the hotel they parted from the officer, his pocket the heavier for a sterling recognition of his services.

"Doctor, before I go I would like to know—to know——"

"Yes, certainly, what is it?"

"Well, the fact is I would like to know—Doctor, didn't she say a word about me?"

"A word about you? Come, now, let me think——"

"Oh!" and the voice put a world of meaning into the curt exclamation. If the Doctor had to think about it, she could not have said much, if anything.

"Why, now I think of it, she said—well, little else."

"Oh!" and the voice again expressed a world of meaning, an Orient world of sunlight.

"'Edrique!' 'Edrique!' It sounded very pret-

tily on her lips. My dear M'sieur Perivale, what a vile trick you have of crushing one's fingers in your monster of a hand. Good-night! Good-night! By the way, you may call to-morrow, here, say two o'clock."

Away down the perspective of the light-dotted street went a young man whose head touched the clouds, whose feet no longer trod the common pavement.

The following day the laundry was the scene of rare excitement. For the first time in its history a carriage drew up at the gate. True, it was an obviously hired vehicle, the livery of the driver and the woeful horseflesh proclaimed the fact aloud; still it was a carriage, and Madame Audrain and her sisters stood in a row in the tiny garden-plot, with bared arms and heads, enjoying the novelty with the zest of children. They regretted the absence of Jules with the delivery cart; he would have had such pride in so brave a show.

Excitement at the anticipated outing had brought a touch of colour to Cecile's cheek and restored some lustre to her dark eyes.

"Where to, Mister?" inquired the driver with the easy manners of a free citizen of the young democracy.

"To the South Head." The Doctor had arranged their destination with Edric before leaving the hotel, and the latter would cross by steamer and join them on the cliffs.

Away they rolled along the roadway that wound its way within sight of the harbour shores, past beautiful homes and by uprising ground that opened out a widespread panorama of the great southern port of Australia. The heat of the sun was tempered by the northeast breeze, bringing with it the fresh purity of sea spaces.

Cecile's enjoyment was so evident that the Doctor had but to glance at her face to feel assured of the fact, as with something of paternal solicitude, or what supplied its place in the economy of his bachelor life, he gazed with placid content on the girl's face. He now and then noticed a shade of expression cross it that touched her lips, and broke their line with a suggestion of some under-current of emotion.

She caught him in the act of scrutiny, and read with a woman's quickness the meaning of the half-humorous and wholly kindly look on his face.

"It—it is not for Edrique, this loveliness?" The almost childish simplicity of the inquiry, the deepened colour in her face, the half-daring, half-timid intonation of the words delighted the Doctor. For the moment he forgot the future in the enjoyment of the present.

"It is not enough, a carriage and pair for Mademoiselle—nor all this beauty," and he waved his hand towards the hill-set harbour, its islands, its white-sailed craft. "It is not enough indeed—without this Edrique?"

"Mon ami—I may so call you, may I not? for you have been a true friend always—mon ami, I never hoped to see Edrique again, and—look, have you not had some such"—she paused for a fitting word, then finding it refused it utterance—"some such, in your life long ago?"

"Perhaps, Cecile, as you say, long ago."

"Just once to speak to him again. Just once again. Mon ami, I had no choice but to leave him without a word. I wrote not because I dare not, I could not. It is not so easy for a woman to do the duty before her, and leave all her happiness just when it has thus come to her, as it came to Edrique and me. I took my courage so," and she clenched her hands, "and went quickly lest, mon ami—lest I should turn back. Now it is all impossible, so that I myself belong not to myself but to my father. I would like to tell him that I went because Monseigneur, his father, showed me so, beyond one little doubt, how wicked it was that I should spoil his life."

"You shall see him, my child. But as you say it is now all impossible, not through Monseigneur, his father, but through yourself."

"Yes, indeed, through myself; my father and I are one always. Edrique will see when I tell him so, he will see surely. Some day he will marry a woman who is good and beautiful, and Monseigneur, his father, will have pride in him. It is so

much better, is it not?—but I, Cecile, I shall remember always the days of our great happiness.”

“Love is a good thing, my little one, even when it becomes only a memory. Perhaps indeed it is best then,” he added after a pause, as if a saving to a too comprehensive sentiment.

“So much the richer shall I be for that little time.”

“Richer, and nearer the heart of things, Cecile.”

Leaving the carriage they crossed to the rugged cliffs at whose base the ocean lashed itself into white rage.

“Away beyond there is the island and my father.” She pointed with outstretched arm to the distant skyline, the sea-breeze lifting the black tresses of her hair and drifting the spray-mist on her face.

“Cecile!” She turned and saw him, hesitated with a little cry, quick, impulsive, then met him midway in the step he took to her. He held her in his arms and kissed her lips.

“Oh, the peoples, Edrique—the peoples!” and she drew apart with a shame-faced look around her; but it was a work day, and only a woman and a child in the distance caught her eye.

The Doctor stood stolidly looking out to sea. His presence was as nothing to them.

“Mes enfants, I have it in my mind to explore a little. Rest you here till I return—say in the half-

hour." So they remained standing close together, with fingers interlaced furtively, as he departed.

Then Edric found a little cave hollowed out of the soft sandstone rock by the beat of spray-filled wind. There they sat with the salt air from the sea on their faces.

They talked long and earnestly, the big-hearted Doctor letting the half-hour slip by, reach the hour, and extend beyond it, till looking down the outspread harbour he could see the twinkle of lights in the grey haze that overhung the distant city.

They talked of the past and its great happiness, the future and its hopelessness. In the shelter of their retreat Edric held her in his arms, she nestling there with a great love and a great duty beating at her heart.

"Oh! my dear love, we have so stickit together always, my father and me, I cannot—I cannot. It will be always so I shall love you. It is such love as will make me good and kind to all the peoples, such love as will make me sing always because I have had it; for me, for me it has been so. Edrique, it will be that you shall make the marriage some day. Non! non! it is not such love I have that would not see you make the marriage, but—but thou wilt not forget me, Edrique, say thou wilt not forget?"

"I shall not forget my little sea-bird. Forget! My God! how could I forget you, Cecile? There is no other woman in the world for me. From this

day you are my wife though we never meet again, though we never share a home, and I never hold you in my arms again, my sea-bird—my little sweetheart who came to me across the sea. You are my wife, Cecile, always my wife. I shall have no other.” He kissed her passionately again and again, on her lips, her cheek, her hair.

“I would not have you not make the marriage, Edrique, but only that she will not make like the door close on our great happiness. It is so we could not love each other if I did not go. It would come always between us if I did not go, and, Edrique, I so love my father, so love him in that other way as a child shall love, that I must go to him—indeed, I must.”

“God in heaven bless you, Cecile—make your life so happy—so happy. You shall go, dearest, you shall go, if it breaks my heart to let you—you shall go.”

“Mes enfants, the sun is setting; it is quite late; we must go!” It was the voice of the Doctor, and apparently the utterance was to the ocean at large, for his back was turned to them, and he gazed far out to sea.

CHAPTER XXXV

LOOKING down from an eminence on the roadway that undulated through an avenue of cocoanut palms to the cleared and grassed space in the valley below, the eye caught against the green of many tints a splash of subdued colour. It was the red brick walls of the convict hospital. Beyond it the valley swept down to the shore, and between it and the far extending sea lay a belt of sunlit sand. The staring sun made a dazzling mirror-like glare of light on the water, which lay unbroken by any wave line, sleeping in a tropic luxury of warmth and indolence. A faint breath of air, moisture-laden and enervating, came off the sea, and listlessly moved in the island foliage. The barred windows of the hospital were open; at either end of the long white walled corridor an arched door, open and sentry-guarded, let the air pass freely over the cropped heads of the invalids in their cots. Down the aisle tiny birds broke the lines of perspective in the curvature of their flight, coming and going with chirp and note, heralds from the outer air of liberty. Some fluttered down to the floor, where a few crumbs had been scattered for them, and

pecked them with the air of assurance and precision that seems to be the birthright of the small. Some, of greater courage or it may be greater heart, had their human friends among the sick, and took crumbs from their hands or let themselves be held in temporary captivity. They were atoms of bustling cheerful life in the place, and the man who hurt them would, in the eyes of his fellows, have committed a crime deeper than murder.

At the further end of the room, near the open door, a woman sat at the side of a cot, the next beside it being vacant. She spent many hours there every day, for the officials in this part of the prison were men of kindness; also the Surgeon-in-Chief had given her a privilege. She had plenty to do, for apart from her own particular duties to the man at whose cot she sat, there were many little offices of kindness to be done for others in the ward. She it was who swathed the iron anklet on old Janini's withered leg—it had become stiff with dragging the double chain—making a soft pad out of an old petticoat. They might well have taken the iron off, for the old man would never rise again. When the wardsman came along the corridor with the folded screen, his comrades of the cot would murmur, "The old scélérat is gone at last!" but Janini clung to life as though it yet might be of use to him and good days lie ahead. Then, too, at times she helped the dressers, for her touch was light and deft. This duty was confined to some only. Neither sickness

nor the approach of death makes saints; but even the lowest in the prison hospital, if not by saving grace, by wholesome fear, kept a clean tongue when the girl passed by.

"Any news yet, Cecile?"

"No, my father, not yet. The despatch from France is expected by any mail now. Poor Caca-louch! It is the suspense, the awful suspense!"

"What does the Doctor Thibault say?"

"He says some of the number will certainly be——" She hesitated.

"Be 'shortened.' Ah, yes!" Bertrand used the prison vernacular for execution by the guillotine.

"He says there have been so many affaires of late that they will make an example."

"The Doctor told you all about it?"

"He told me some—not all—I think not all."

"But you have heard?"

"Yes, I have heard. They killed him!"

"Paul Menaud?"

"Yes!" Doctor Thibault had mercifully glossed over the truth for her. She did not know, and never would know, the life of petty tyranny to which her father had been subjected since his return to the island, at the hands of Paul Menaud. As the second in authority at Ile Nou, a promotion in rank he had received through his rescue of the little garrison in the valley of the Foa, he had never ceased to persecute Bertrand since his deportation. He had on some specious pretext doubled for him

the period of solitary confinement that formed part of his sentence for evasion, had afterwards put him on the road-gang in double chain, tried in short every form of punishment he could within the law inflict to bend the convict to his will. In the solitary cell he had repeated interviews with him. Menaud held the fixed idea that Bertrand had in some way disposed of his daughter—how he could not say—hidden her that she should not return to the convict settlement. It was not so much that he had a passion for the girl as that he should be foiled in his purpose. He was strong of will—his march across the mountains had proved it; other acts of courage and daring in his life had proved it also; and to cross his will, to thwart him in his desire, was to stir the depths of his nature. Masterful for good, he was also masterful for evil. He promised Bertrand innumerable concessions—some, the convict knew full well, were not within his power to grant—concessions of re-settlement on the land, of settlement in the town on ticket-of-leave, where he could practise his profession—there were convict druggists, dentists, clerks, mechanics in the little capital who were as good as free men but for their social ostracism. He flatly refused to believe the truth as Bertrand told it to him—the disaster of the lost boat in the storm—and made life so unendurable to the man that in the end he desired death.

One day Menaud rode past a chain gang on the

road where Bertrand and Cacalouch laboured side by side, a brief daily intercourse of mute companionship that made the one gleam of light in their lives. As he passed, Bertrand momentarily paused in his work. Menaud laid his horsewhip across the convict's back, and the man with a cry of pain jumped forward, the instinct of retaliation mastering him. At the same moment, Cacalouch with an oath rushed at the horse's head. Then Menaud drew his revolver and fired on Bertrand, already on the ground cumbered by the double chain. The act, so far from cowing the sullen group of convicts who stood idly by with pick and shovel in hand, inflamed them with rage. Almost before the Surveillants in charge of the gang could draw their revolvers, Paul Menaud was a dead man, dragged from his horse and stamped into the red clay of the road.

Cacalouch as a matter of fact held the horse, and was still holding it when Menaud went down and was murdered. It was he who possessed himself of the dead man's revolver, and in doing so let the restless horse escape.

"Maudit! the beast will tell the tale for us;" and he sent shot upon shot after him till the chambers were exhausted, but without effect.

The Surveillants called on the men to surrender, and one put a bullet in the most demonstrative of the mutineers.

For a moment the officers stood their ground,

emptying their revolvers with more or less effect into the cluster of men round Menaud's body; then, as with vile imprecations the convicts advanced on them, they turned and fled.

For five days the gang roamed at large, plundering food where they could get it, wandering aimlessly whither they knew not. On the sixth day a body of military surrounded them, and like sheep they were driven back to the prison fold. It was a wild outburst of passion, irrational and bestial, but not without incentive. The Council of War tried them, and with impartial justice sentenced every man to death, either as a principal or accessory in the murder. Bertrand alone they recommended to mercy. The sentences were, in accordance with law, sent home to France for confirmation by the President. It was not thought that all would be confirmed, though certainly some of the condemned would ascend the scaffold.

The bullet had penetrated Bertrand's left lung, and the hemorrhage had been excessive, almost draining his life on the spot. However, he still survived, despite the intermittent recurrence of the bleeding.

How many times she recounted her adventures in Queensland, how many times Cecile spoke of the loving motherly care of "the Madame" of Mon Repos, she could not have recalled. When everything else palled with Bertrand, the reading of books, the little gossip she could gather for him, he

asked her to tell him again of the life at Mon Repos and of "the Madame." One evening when only the dim oil lamps along the wall broke the gloom of the hospital, when between her and her father the mosquito nets were drawn so that she could speak to him as if he were not wholly present, in half communion with herself, she told him her love-story, very simply, almost reverently, for it was her dead, and laid to rest in her heart. It was all impossible; Monseigneur, the Bishop, had said so—of Bertrand himself she breathed no word—still it was good to have one's dead near one—as it were in one's heart so that one could make at times a dream of it.

When she had ceased, she felt a movement on her lap, and underneath the curtain edge her father's hand sought hers. It was a very restful time there in the dark—not altogether quiet, perhaps, for there was tossing and turning in the cots—but they could sit there together, and she could hold the rough hand in hers and none would see when she pressed it to her lips. He was her father, and she loved him; and God had bidden her honour him and care for him. It was a right thing; she would not do anything but this right thing to the father who had been so good to her, always together from her childhood, but—and a tear plashed on the hand she clasped around her father's. She shook her head with a little touch of anger, and

made her eyes stare into the gloom—it was not brave to act thus, and she must be brave and true.

The same vessel that brought the despatch from France settling the fate of the condemned men brought also for Doctor Thibault an astonishing letter from the Bishop of Capricornia. The Bishop in somewhat formal language stated that he had for some time past contemplated taking a holiday, and having considered the subject of their interview at Bishops court on the night preceding the Doctor's departure South, he thought that some explanation was due to Bertrand. The fact of the confession had been disclosed almost unwittingly at the interview, but, having happened, it would no longer be right for him to withhold the rest.

The language was set and precise, the handwriting betrayed no indication of emotion. Two there were alone who knew at what cost, what summoning of resolution at the call of a will, weakened by years of repentance that but cloaked a moral cowardice, the brief epistle had been written.

To Bertrand himself the Doctor said nothing of the substance of his interview. Had he returned to find his friend in full health, with the weight of punishment for years to come still resting on him, he would have re-opened the case with the possibility of some mitigation of the sentence being allowed. Now, however, it could be of no avail; the prison load was slipping off Bertrand's shoulders. Thibault knew quite well that whatever happened

to the rest, one sentence of death would be fulfilled. Why, then, torture a dying man with the bitter reflections such a disclosure must arouse? However, the Bishop had now taken the matter out of his hands. He would leave him to settle it as best he could.

Almost immediately after reading his own post Doctor Thibauld sought an interview with the Governor. Bertrand and Cecile had both described to him the part Cacalouch had played in the escape from the island, reciting his chivalry, his courage, his resource, the native gentleness in the man's nature. Cecile had implored him to secure for her access to the Governor, that she might plead his cause in person.

Thibauld, thinking it over, held it to be wiser and kindlier both to the girl and the Governor not to take that course. If Cacalouch were on the list of those about to die, the Governor must refuse to answer any prayer, and the scene would be intensely painful, not only to her but to His Excellency, a man whose humanity, as it happened, overshadowed his administrative ability. So he determined to go alone.

The Governor could receive him for a few minutes only. The newly-arrived mail meant a busy morning for the Chief Administrator.

"Ah, M'sieur le Docteur, what is it you wish of me?"

"I hear your Excellency has just received the des-

patch from Monsieur le President with regard to those unhappy fellows concerned in the murder of Captain Menaud. Is it so?"

"Comment! It is wonderful how official news leaks out. Yes, M'sieur, it is here," and he laid his hands on a document at his side on the table.

"Will you be so good as to let me know if the name of one Cacalouch, who was one of the condannés, is on the list of those to be executed?"

The Governor who, throughout the interview, had continued to sign his name to numerous letters and documents, lifted his head. "M'sieur would like to know more than I can tell him or any other officer of the penal administration. My instructions are to keep the names secret till the day of execution."

"What the devil! Pardon me, but it is so extraordinary——"

"The President has set apart for the penalty of death such of the condemned as——" here the Governor paused, fearing that too much might be said—"well, as in his discretion he thought fit; but in order that the occasion may act as a deterrent from such crimes, all too frequent of late, M'sieur, I am instructed to keep the names secret till the end."

"Then all the condannés will remain in suspense?"

"That is the intention—as a punishment to all."

"The day, of course, is secret; that is customary; but the actual men?"

"Those are my instructions, M'sieur le Docteur."

"Then you cannot tell me whether this man Cacalouch is one who will suffer the extreme penalty?"

"I may not do so. Has M'sieur any further business with me?" And the Governor, with an official smile and an expressive shrug, indicated the piles of papers and correspondence on his writing-table.

"Nothing further, your Excellency. There is, of course, no restriction on my access to the prisoners? It is as usual?"

"Oh, certainly! As usual. You may see this man when you like, but remember I give you no indication of any hope."

Such news as he had the Doctor conveyed to Bertrand and Cecile. "It is certain all will not be executed—so much I had from the Governor. Indeed, one could not conceive such a holocaust as that! It is then possible that Cacalouch may be spared."

To Cacalouch also he carried this meagre crumb of comfort.

"Truly, M'sieur le Docteur, 'tis not such a fat worm as would fill the belly of a little fish, this hope of yours—mais que veux-tu! It is a hope, and it is so with me that I despise not little things. Was it not thus with my mother, who made much out of little, and by such economies, such laying out of

things, bestowed on me the excellences of an education that would befit a *petit commis* indeed, had I not larger views of things such as my father had before me. *Hélas!* So has it come about that I am here!"

"You have a spirit, *Cacalouch!* If it be that you are called you will die like a brave man."

"Has *M'sieur* reason to doubt it? Such spirit have I of my father, who had it of his—he who served under the little Corporal—that if it were so I could die twice without winking. Still it is not that I desire the thing—one seeks not such a misfortune, indeed. To one who has love of adventures, it is but a dull thing to lie dead, thus! *Quand on est mort c'est pour longtemps—vraiment!*"

The authorities did not delay the day of execution. Late in the evening of the day following the receipt of the despatch, the Doctor received official instructions to be present at *Ile Nou*. He embarked from the mainland at five o'clock on the following morning with the Director, the Sub-director of the penal administration, and other officials. By moonlight the guillotine had been erected in a large enclosure facing the convict barracks of the fifth class. To right and left of the guillotine were extended lines of infantry under arms, and at its foot were grouped armed *Surveillants* and a body of *Canaques* of the native police force. In the space beyond the *Surveillants*, between the lines of military, and menaced by a *mitrailleuse*, were massed some 500

convicts in chains. They had been confined to their cells early the previous evening, during the erection of the guillotine.

At six o'clock the Commandant, attended by the prison chaplain in his vestments and a guard of Surveillants, went to announce to the condemned men their fate of which till now they had been kept in ignorance.

Cacalouch with his fellow condamnés, alert with fear that sent a shock to their hearts with the opening of each prison door, had heard during the night the beating of hammers and the sawing of wood.

As the clattering approach of the Commandant and his guard sounded in the corridor, the convict's heart seemed for the moment to stand still. When the final moment came he had no fear of himself; he would walk decently and bravely to the scaffold; but for the time the uncertainty played on his nerves. The guard stopped at a cell down the corridor, and a door was unlocked. He heard the Commandant's voice, a momentary confusion of sound followed by silence, then the clatter of retreating feet.

Cacalouch breathed again. The condemned men had been allowed tobacco. He rolled a cigarette between his fingers, stiff and clammy, and exhaled long wisps of smoke through his nostrils. His mind was blank. It could hold no thought.

In the square below, in the yet uncertain light of the breaking morning, the convicts stood in rank

waiting the procession of their condemned comrades to the guillotine. Rude jests passed furtively from one to the other; some less callous stood mute, motionless and pale-faced.

At the given command, as the head of the little procession from the prison entered the square, the soldiers charged their arms. "A genoux!"

At the words the convicts fell on their knees with the clinking of many chains, a crop-headed sinister crew.

Number one, his bloodless lips moving rapidly, his eyes fixed on the cross held before him by the priest, passed through the ranks of kneeling convicts to his death.

Cacalouch in the cell, with his ears cocked like the ears of a dog, heard the noise of the falling chains, and a minute later the roll of drums. All was over with Number one of the death list. He rolled another cigarette, licking it with a tongue barely moistened, lit it and sent the smoke with momentary bliss through his nostrils. Again the clatter in the corridor. They were coming nearer this time, opposite his cell. He threw the half-consumed cigarette on the floor, and rose from the stool on which he had been seated. No! it was the cell next to his. He steadied himself at the reaction by holding to the bar of the prison window; he could just reach it. The air blew in on him. His forehead was icy cold. He put his hand to it and wiped away the sweat. Why, why did they

torture one like this? Was it to break one's spirit? They would not do it—not they—not they! He sat down again, and rolled another cigarette; but there was a nausea on him and he could not smoke it.

He rested his head on his hands, and seemed to drift into sleep or a stupor that masked it. There was no return of the clatter in the corridor. Had there been he would not have noticed it. The door of the cell opened, and Doctor Thibault entered.

"Cacalouch! rouse, man, rouse. It is all over. They have executed but three!"

"It is all over?" repeated Cacalouch mechanically.

Gradually the blood returned to his face as the Doctor spoke to him with kindly words of comfort.

"Mon Dieu! it is such waiting as would kill the spirit of a Gascon—he would have but little talk in him after such an affair. Yet, M'sieur le Docteur, I would have gone as a brave man, not as your Gascon indeed with much talk—for truly I have but little stomach for these braggarts—but as a man. It is but natural that one should feel such waiting, but at the moment it came I would be there—Cacalouch, myself!"

"I have no doubt of it, no doubt, at all!"

"As to the rest of us, it is 'for life,' I suppose?" The Doctor nodded his head.

"This is a devil of a place 'for life.' Still there are some adventures, eh? Some adventures. Tout

dit, it is better to be a live Cacalouch than a dead Emperor!"

"Whilst there is life there is hope—so they say! And after all you may outlive the official 'life.' "

"Truly! I see a little vineyard far off. Ma foi! far off, indeed."

To Bertrand and Cecile the news of the clemency of the President to their friend was received with joy, even on the terms of a life sentence. It left room for a dim future. To them, Cacalouch the condemned was indeed Cacalouch their saviour—Cacalouch who had led them through perils to a distant land true, staunch, resourceful.

CHAPTER XXXVI

BERTRAND was sinking fast. If the Bishop were to see him there must be no delay. So thought Thibault as he put off from shore to board the incoming steamer from Sydney.

Scarcely had the vessel come to anchor than it was surrounded by a flotilla of small boats, manned by Canaques in various stages of undress. The Doctor, looking up from his boat, recognised the Bishop leaning over the bulwarks. At present it was impossible to reach him. A passenger monopolised the gangway, gesticulating excitedly. Six bottles of pickles, his property, had just disappeared into the sea; and an old Canaque with a pith helmet on his head and a woman's print dress round his loins was putting off from the ship. To him the passenger's wife addressed herself in plaintive expostulation, to which he answered with affable inclinations of the head. Her hat box, a cardboard thing with the proportions of a drum, had been made the support for a case of apples. When the first riot of disembarkation was at an end the Doctor got aboard; and soon, with his boatman's aid, transferred the Bishop and his luggage to the quay.

"I shall be honoured if Monseigneur will make my quarters his hotel. That is, if he will be content with such comfort as a bachelor's apartments can afford."

The Bishop was pleased to accept the hospitality offered to him. As Thibault assisted him up the slimy stone steps that led to the quay, he reflected that he must have misjudged the prelate's age. This appeared to be a much feebler, an older man than the one he had faced so recently. Perhaps it was the effect of the sea voyage!

"Had Monseigneur a good trip across?"

"Excellent, Doctor! But I am a good sailor, and enjoy the sea. How is your friend—and his daughter, is she also well?"

Thibault gave him a brief outline of Bertrand's misadventure and its consequences. "Monseigneur is but just in time. The hemorrhage from the lung is now almost constant, and will assuredly drain his life. The unhappy one is indeed but a ghost to look at—so pale, so fragile."

The Bishop returned no answer. They traversed the place des cocotiers with its fringe of palms and flamboyant trees and central band-stand, on the way to the Doctor's quarters. He had to make an effort to break the ice of reserve between them concerning their previous meeting. "In my letter to you, Doctor, I—er—stated the object of this visit."

"You did, Monseigneur."

"You have, of course—of course—formed some opinion on—this matter?"

"To be frank, I have. One forms opinions—not necessarily right, that goes without saying, still one formulates one's theory."

"May I ask what that is?"

It was the Doctor's turn to pause.

"Monseigneur, I apprehend, desires to make some reparation, some atonement, on behalf—so I would think—on behalf of the one who confessed."

"It is that confession I wish to state to Monsieur Bertrand fully, at whatever cost to the man who makes it!"

"Ah! It is late, too late to profit Bertrand. Your penitent, Monseigneur, saved his skin, did he not?"

The Bishop did not reply.

"Still he will suffer. Monseigneur has doubtless met such cases where men suffer twice over by the conscience, once for the sin, once for the cowardice, eh?"

"Monsieur le Docteur forgets that this unhappy man never knew the consequences of his sin till I had it from Monsieur's own mouth."

"True! There is that to be said—but the atonement is too late for Bertrand, not the less."

"I wish to see him, at once. May I do so this afternoon?"

"I shall so arrange it."

Through the good offices of the Doctor, who

had represented the convict's case as hopeless, he had been removed from the general ward to a separate room, where privacy could be secured for him. There Cecile waited on him almost continuously, with only such odd periods of rest as were essential to prevent her own breakdown.

When they entered the room, she rose from her seat by the bedside to meet them.

The Bishop addressed her.

"Mademoiselle, may I see your father alone?" Cecile looked at the Doctor inquiringly. She had been informed of the proposed visit.

"Monseigneur has some news, some information, to convey to your father, Cecile. Will half-an-hour suffice?"—this to the Bishop.

"I think so."

"I am afraid that is the utmost I can allow. You may return in half-an-hour, Cecile." Without a word she left the room. "Does Monseigneur wish me also to retire? It is for him to consider whether I may be of assistance. My friend speaks no English."

"At one time I spoke French fluently, and since I saw you last I have endeavoured to revive my memory."

"Then you will not need me?" and the Doctor turned to go.

"Stay, Doctor—you know——" and he looked at him in pitiful humiliation.

"Eh bien! I know Monseigneur has a confession to make."

"You need not go, Doctor Thibault. I have a confession to make—my own, God help me!"

The Doctor bowed his head and turned to Bertrand, who lay in the dull inertia of extreme weakness.

"Mon ami! This good Monseigneur here wishes to confess to you. It is for you to give the priest absolution or his penance. Sit here—it is his daughter's seat." The abruptness of the words, with a certain intonation of contempt in them, cut deep into the Bishop's heart.

He sat by the bedside, and for a moment covered his face with his hands. It may be he sought renewal of his strength.

"Ernest Bertrand, I confess—I confess on my knees," and he sank by the bedside, and bent his head in shame. "I confess before my God and you that I am the murderer of the man for whose death you have suffered. I ask your forgiveness, and I am here to take the punishment you lay upon me." He spoke slowly in studied French.

"You were the man who strangled him?"

"I struck him for an insult, a menace, to my sister. Then—then, oh, my God! I forgot everything, and killed him in my passion."

"You are the father of Edrique?"

"I am!"

Bertrand, propped up on his pillows so that he

could look through the open window of the room to the curved line of beach and the sea beyond, said no more.

"Monsieur," continued the Bishop, "it was not till Doctor Thibault told me of your sufferings that I knew the awful consequences of my sin. How could I tell—so much in justice you will admit—how could I tell?"

"Monseigneur could have faced the consequences of his act," interposed Thibault coldly.

"I confess my cowardice. God knows it has haunted me all these years. I doubt if Monsieur has suffered as much as I have done."

"Comment! It is not too bad to suffer on a soft bed, on pullets and wine—un saint homme de chat!" came the cutting voice of the Doctor; and the kneeling figure by the bedside winced, as if under the lash of a whip.

But Bertrand betrayed no emotion, his eyes fixed steadfastly on the open sea.

"I have written this confession, and will leave it with you. You may publish it throughout Australia, throughout the world. I shall take it as God's punishment for my sin." He drew the paper from his breast pocket, and put it in the white hands on the coverlet. Then he rose feebly with the effort of an old man, old beyond his years, and stood regarding Bertrand feebly, as if broken in will and life.

"Monseigneur did not kill the man. It was I who killed him."

"Peste!" muttered the Doctor petulantly.

"The man," continued Bertrand, "was not dead when Monseigneur left him. I could have restored him to life. It was in my power, by my skill as a physician, to do it. But I did not, because I wished him dead. I let him die—deliberately—because I wanted it so. At the time it did not seem to me thus, but now I know I killed him. Monseigneur had no thought to kill him, whilst, as to me, I wished him dead, and let him die."

The Doctor pursed his lips and shrugged his shoulders.

"So it is with me, having such intent to kill the vile beast, that the murder lies, not with Monseigneur, who had no thought of it, but lost himself in passion for his sister. Let it be so, Monseigneur; I pray you let it be so. You, I, we shall go before the Great Judge, to me soon, to you some day. Leave it to Him to judge between us. As for this," he tore the paper in two and held it out to the Bishop, "burn it. We go as children to the Judgment, we who are old ones; it is not good for us to carry vengeance to the feet of God. It is for Him to judge and punish—not for me, Monseigneur." He held out his hand, and the Bishop clasped it in his own and held it there, the sense of a community in pain drawing him to the dying man.

"As for you, Thibauld, mon ami, I ask you to

forget all you have heard. Monseigneur has done his duty, and offered in atonement a great price, the sacrifice of all that is dear to him. It is not needed——”

“It has come all too late!” said Thibauld curtly.

“It is not needed, I say. It was never needed—whatever the law may be in such matters the guilt before Heaven is mine. I accept it. You promise, Thibauld?”

“At your wish, Bertrand, I promise to keep silent; to forget is impossible. Still, Monseigneur, who has had such care of his own good name, owes you a debt he cannot set aside. He cannot restore to you the lost years; he cannot undo the wrong of the past; he cannot give you back your happiness, your life—but he may cleanse your name.”

“Thibauld, I beseech you say no more! Monseigneur has suffered; he, too, has borne his punishment; is it not between us two that we should forgive?”

“I declare, Bertrand, it is but just that he should cleanse your name—if not for your sake, to whom it matters little, then for that of Cecile.”

“Cecile!” Bertrand felt a tightening pressure on his hand as he looked into the face of the Bishop, who had re-seated himself at the bedside. “I leave that to Monseigneur. He may find a way to do as you say. Ah! there she is. Cecile, come here!”

The Doctor looked at his watch; the half-hour had elapsed.

"Mademoiselle may enter! It is time Monseigneur left. There is nothing more. Perhaps to-morrow, mon ami——"

"Please, Doctor!" The Bishop, with a final pressure of the hand he resigned, rose and addressed himself to Cecile.

"Mademoiselle Cecile, when last we met I asked you to set my son free. For all I said then I ask your pardon; I beg Mademoiselle to let me recall my words."

"Monseigneur believes my father to be innocent?"

"More, I know him to be so!"

"It is as I said always, 'he is innocent?' "

"He is innocent. I offer you a new name, Cecile, less worthy than your father's, but the name of the dearest one I have on earth—the name of my son. Monsieur Bertrand, will you consent to the marriage of your daughter with my son Edric? I beg it!"

"Monseigneur, I consent—and you, Cecile?"

"Oh, my father, my father—it is of such happiness we dreamed and dreamed, Edrique and me!" and slipping to the side of his bed she nestled her head on his pillow."

"The little sea-bird has come through the night. It is well. The night closes all for the one as the

day dawns for the other," said Thibault to himself, looking through the open window.

It was in the dawn of the third day after, that with Bertrand's hand in Cecile's, Death entered the prison, unbarred the gates and set No. 495 free.

EPILOGUE

Cecile with little Suzanne, she of the dark glossy hair, such as her mother's had been before it became touched with grey, stood on the verandah looking down the broad pathway that led to the river-bank. They were waiting the return of Edric and the boys, who had been over to Mon Repos, where "the Madame" still made a show of exercising control over "Sherry" and the plantation management. Practically, however, the place was managed by Perivale, the old couple taking their ease. Under the terms of "the Madame's" will, with the full acquiescence of her husband, the property would pass at the death of the survivor of them to her two godsons, the lads Frank and Ernest, who already reached to their father's shoulder, loose-limbed, sun-burned striplings of the land. Frank, the elder, had been born the year the Bishop resigned his See and returned to England. The latter now lay at rest in the grave-yard at Trescott; but Miss Betty might be found, as Edric on a recent visit to the homeland had found her, still at the cottage, and still snipping and spraying the tall standard roses in her garden.

Edric and his sons came up the pathway, and the two on the verandah, expectant of messages and gifts from "Grannie," as "the Madame" had been re-christened, went down to meet them. Sure enough they could see some packets in the boys' hands. "Grannie's" ingenuity in devising gifts of all kinds—pots of rosella jam, speckled turkey-eggs and what-not—for the little Suzanne, the darling of her heart, was marvellous.

But who was the stranger with them, tall, thin and somewhat stooped, yet with a certain jaunty air about him, raising his head at intervals and expanding his chest?

The little Suzanne, who had outstripped her mother, stood and stared at him in momentary awe.

The tall, thin man raised his hat. "Bon jour, Ma'm'selle!"

The little Suzanne made a quaint curtsy with an odd suggestion of the minuet in it, and piped in childish treble: "Bon jour, M'sieur!"

"Ma foi!" said the tall, thin man. "Had we but the Papa Bertrand here what times, indeed, what times! It was so with him always that he could not resist a child. Of the art diplomatic he knew indeed as little—such it is to have in one's self the heart of a child. Ma petite, did thy mother ever tell thee of great adventures, such as make life, indeed, and of one Cacalouch—it may have been 'the brave Cacalouch?' Think, my little angel, have you heard of such a one?"

She took him by the hand, and pulled him eagerly along the pathway.

"Mother! mother! it is 'le brave Cacalouch.' Vraiment! vraiment! Maman!"

But mother knew it before the words were spoken. It needed no guessing. One quick observant glance sufficed for Cecile.

"Oh! Cacalouch, mon ami! You are free at last."

She took him by the arm and laughed and cried, patted him, and laughed again and cried again.

Later in the day, when they stood together on the verandah, Cacalouch straightened his back, gave a little strut and shook his head.

"I am not so old, indeed, not so old but I shall make a little vineyard here."

"That you shall!" replied Edric heartily.

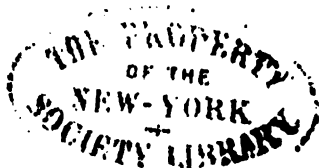
Cecile laughed a low-toned sympathetic laugh that spoke its message. "It was ever so, mon ami! It has come at last—the little vineyard—but after so many years."

"Truly, indeed! One is not so young as when we found a deep sea-way through the Great Barrier. Eh, Madame?"

"We are in quiet waters now, all the barriers past, Cacalouch," and Edric drew his wife to his side.

"All but the one, Edrique; and perhaps, dearest, He will find a way to let us pass that hand-in-hand."

"Truly indeed, truly," commented Cacalouch.
"All barriers are broken by deep ways to the bon
Dieu."



Schleuning

Jan

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